

Approaching the Altar:
Art, Agency and Appreciation at the Cathedral of the Blessed Sacrament,
Christchurch

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of the requirements for the Degree of
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by

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*Dedicated to the memory of the late Bishop Barry Jones, D.D., ninth Roman Catholic
Bishop of Christchurch (28.08.41 - 13.02.16), worthy successor of the first bishop, John
Joseph Grimes, D.D., S.M.*

In thanks for his wise leadership after the earthquakes.

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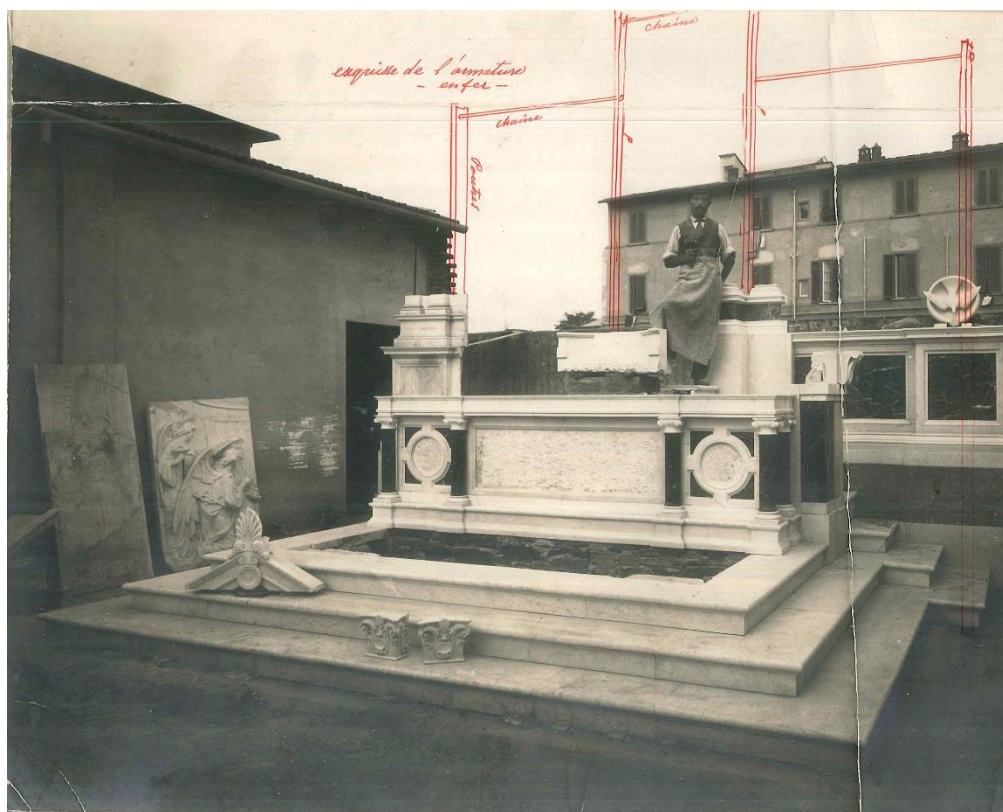
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Permission to reproduce material from CCDA is gratefully acknowledged.



*Guiseppe Cassioli with the partially assembled high altar at his workshop in Florence, 1915.
CCDA.*

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Abstract

This thesis examines the three high altars used successively in Cathedral of the Blessed Sacrament, Christchurch: a wooden altar transferred from the earlier pro-cathedral in 1905; a large marble altar made by Giuseppe Cassioli, a Florentine painter and sculptor, installed in 1916; and a modern altar of reconstituted stone designed by the architect Miles Warren, which replaced the Cassioli altar in 1974. The architectural and liturgical contexts of the altars is discussed.

Giuseppe Cassioli is now completely unknown in New Zealand art history, despite his contemporary reputation and significant commissions in Europe and elsewhere. The thesis argues that his careful use of a wide range of sources, his technical skills, and his concern that his works were appropriate in their settings are features of his oeuvre. These can all be seen in his Christchurch altar. Although praised in 1916 the altar was mocked prior to its removal. This has contributed to the current neglect of the artist and his work in New Zealand. The grounds on which it was derided during the re-ordering of the cathedral are also examined.

A number of traditional art historical approaches are applied to the altars. Their iconography, style, form, authorship, artistic merit and reception/appreciation are investigated where appropriate using a taxonomic framework. They are examined chronologically and relevant issues of patronage and personality are acknowledged in the narrative, as are recent interdisciplinary “approaches”. A range of previously unknown archival materials are used throughout.

Introduction

The Roman Catholic Cathedral of the Blessed Sacrament, designed by architect Francis Petre and opened in 1905, was a Christchurch landmark for over a hundred years before the devastating earthquakes of 2010 and 2011 (figs. 4, 5).¹ It was the architectural frame for its successive high altars which form the topic of this study. The building's predecessor on the same site, the Church of the Blessed Sacrament, was designated the pro-Cathedral after the creation of the Catholic diocese of Christchurch in 1877 and arrival of the first Catholic bishop, Bishop John Joseph Grimes in 1888. This building will also be briefly examined, as the altar in use during its latter years was transferred into the new cathedral in 1905.

In 1916 the “temporary” pro-Cathedral altar was replaced by a polychrome marble altar, with reliefs and panels of gilt bronze, the work of the Italian sculptor and painter, Giuseppe Cassioli, after a preparatory design by Christchurch architects S. and A. Luttrell (fig. 23). This altar was removed in 1974 as part of a conservation programme which included the reordering of the interior: it was replaced by a very different altar designed by the Christchurch architect, Miles Warren, who was appointed to direct the re-ordering of the interior in accordance with a brief supplied. The Warren altar was installed in the same year (figs. 37, 38).

The removal of the Cassioli altar was a divisive issue within the church community. The attachment felt to it by many, and the objections to its continued presence by others, go beyond matters of aesthetic judgment, though these were raised at the time and will be examined. Is a high altar always a “sacred” object, or does it become sacred at particular times? Who has access to it and what happens on it? What are the different ways in which it functions? Why was this altar portrayed and received so very differently in the media reports of 1916 and 1974? What had changed? The impact of modernism in architecture, the pre- and post- World War II Liturgical Movement and the Second

¹ See Appendix 1 for information concerning the post-earthquake future of the Cathedral of the Blessed Sacrament as at the time of thesis submission.

Vatican Council of 1962-1965 were all significant factors, although they cannot be fully explored here.²

The altar, as *locus* of meaning in a Catholic church, the place where the Mass is celebrated, has theological, liturgical, symbolic and devotional significance for Catholics. The form of an altar, its place in its architectural context, any decorative or figurative elements and, more recently, its reception by various groups of contemporary beholders, have all been regarded as legitimate subjects by art historians.³

Catholic belief holds that at the altar the sacrifice of Christ is bloodlessly repeated, and through the ritual action of an ordained priest the process of transubstantiation takes place, by which the offered elements of bread and wine actually become the Body and Blood of Christ. This Eucharistic sacrifice, as Eucharistic meal, is then consumed and shared by communicant members during the Mass.⁴ Consecrated hosts are also “reserved” in a Catholic church, traditionally in a locked cupboard known as a tabernacle, from which they may be taken out for distribution to the sick as required, or venerated by the faithful. A host may also be “exposed” for public veneration, in a vessel known as a monstrance, placed above or on the altar. Changes in Eucharistic devotional emphasis (for example, from sacrifice to meal) have implications for both the form and placement of the altar in a Catholic church.

While the architecture of Francis Petre’s Christchurch basilica has been examined in detail, its successive high altars have received scant critical attention since the initial very detailed accounts found in contemporary print media, sources which will be cited extensively.⁵

² The Council is hereafter referred to as Vatican II.

³ Geraldine A. Johnson’s probing study of the possible relationship between altar design, reception and the interests of various groups of “beholders”, serves as an impressive model. “Approaching the Altar: Donatello’s Sculpture in the Santo”, *Renaissance Quarterly*. Vol. 52, No. 3, Autumn, 1999, pp.627-666.

⁴ See, for example, Kieran Flanagan, *Sociology and Liturgy. Re-presentations of the Holy*, New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1991, p.4.

⁵ Philippe Hamilton, “Francis Petre, 1847-1918: an investigation into New Zealand architectural biography”, M.A. Thesis (Art History), University of Auckland; Diane Wynn-Williams, “The Basilicas of F.W. Petre”, M.A. Thesis (Art History), University of Canterbury, 1982.

An overview of the sources used is now attempted, followed by discussion of the methodologies selected for this study and the contents of each chapter.

Research Materials

In addition to various New Zealand and overseas newspapers and journals, both Catholic and secular, relevant correspondence, personal papers, minutes, circulars and publicity materials from the Christchurch Catholic Diocesan Archives are used extensively.⁶ The archives' extensive holdings of architectural drawings and photographs are also crucial to this study: many have not previously been examined. The CCDA material concerning the Cassioli altar are crucial to this study: a large number of documents concerning the commission, and photographs of its component parts supplied by the sculptor, Giuseppe Cassioli, exist only in these holdings.

For the purposes of this thesis, two local histories are also key documents. Michael O'Meehan completed a diocesan centenary history, while Michael Hanrahan was later responsible for the book celebrating the cathedral's centenary.⁷ In O'Meehan's work the appearance of the interior of the 1864 Church of the Blessed Sacrament, as described in contemporary accounts in *The Press*, is noted, though the altar is not specifically mentioned.⁸ He does briefly acknowledge that the cathedral's architect, Francis Petre, designed a high altar which was never executed, and notes that the wooden altar from the pro-cathedral was transferred to the new building in 1905 as a temporary measure.⁹ The marble Luttrells/ Cassioli altar, ordered in 1913 and installed in 1916, is deemed "out of harmony with Petre's design" and its removal, as part of the re-ordering of the cathedral's interior, is seen as a focus for "all the frustration a section of the diocese felt at the whole range of change".¹⁰ O'Meehan does not mention the modern replacement altar designed by the architect Miles Warren, and in fact does not mention Miles Warren's role at all.

⁶ Hereafter termed CCDA, following post-earthquake relocation to new premises in Washington Way, Christchurch; previously cited as CDA (Christchurch Diocesan Archives) in most publications.

⁷ Michael O'Meehan S.M., *Held Firm by Faith: A History of the Catholic Diocese of Christchurch 1840-1897*, Christchurch: Catholic Diocese of Christchurch, 1988. Michael Hanrahan, *'A Suitable Temple': A History of the Cathedral of the Blessed Sacrament, Christchurch, New Zealand 1905-2005*, Ashburton: Cathedral of the Blessed Sacrament Centennial Committee, 2004.

⁸ O'Meehan. p.64.

⁹ Ibid. p.237.

¹⁰ Ibid., p.307.

His is a general history of the diocese, with little attention paid to art historical matters, and his thorough and wide-ranging work does not include any photographs of the interior of the earlier church or of the cathedral.

Michael Hanrahan's history of the cathedral gives far more attention to the interiors of both buildings.¹¹ As did O'Meehan, Hanrahan naturally makes extensive use of published contemporary accounts, and in addition to chronicling changes to the interiors he includes several photographs.¹² He notes the elaborate decoration of the sanctuary for the cathedral's opening in 1905 and is very aware of community patronage and piety as reflected in the furnishings.¹³ Hanrahan notes that the "wooden Gothic high altar" of the pro-Cathedral was transferred to the cathedral where it served until the arrival of the Luttrells/Cassioli high altar which was in place in time for the consecration of Bishop Grimes' successor, Bishop Brodie.¹⁴ Hanrahan, like O'Meehan before him, sees a resulting "clash of styles" between the altar and Petre's architecture with its "simple, clean neo-classic lines".¹⁵ He presents the architect's intention as being one of "an uncluttered building with an emphasis on its neo-classical lines", a vision which Hanrahan sees fulfilled in the 1970s re-ordering scheme with its altar by Warren. At the same time the re-ordered sanctuary brings the sanctuary into liturgical consonance with changed Vatican requirements.¹⁶ What he terms "filth, gloom and clutter" are swept away, and all "inappropriate" furnishings removed.¹⁷ Hanrahan also acknowledges the opposition to the removals, and deals with this in more detail than O'Meehan: attempting to explain the depth of feeling involved he notes that opposition had been anticipated from "those who had grown to love the building as it was, and those who simply resisted change because it was change".¹⁸ Hanrahan provides a more deeply-considered context to such opposition by noting that many parish churches had already

¹¹ Hanrahan, op.cit.

¹² Ibid., for example, the interior of the pro-Cathedral on p.28; the interior of the cathedral at its opening, p.61; Bishop Grimes' famed Chapel of Holy Relics, p.69; the pro-cathedral high altar decorated for exposition in the cathedral, p.70; the Luttrells/Cassioli high altar, p.79; and the re-ordered cathedral sanctuary with the Warren altar in place, p.93. Hanrahan has, moreover, deposited in CCDA photocopies of all primary sources used, in chronological order. This has on occasion yielded additional relevant information, and the debt is acknowledged.

¹³ Ibid., p.61.

¹⁴ Ibid., p.56.

¹⁵ Ibid., pp.78-79.

¹⁶ Ibid., p.90.

¹⁷ Ibid., pp.87, 91, 96.

¹⁸ Ibid., p.90.

been re-ordered after Vatican II and that “the people had little say about what happened to their churches, and there had been much heartache and resistance over the removal of decorative features, especially altars”.¹⁹

This thesis argues that both O’Meeghan’s and Hanrahan’s judgements on the architect’s intended vision for the cathedral, the artistic merit and appropriateness of the Luttrells/Cassioli altar, and the aesthetic success of the 1970s re-ordering, (seen as conforming to Petre’s vision), closely reflect the views presented in the materials produced by the diocese at the time of the re-ordering. These materials were taken up by the media of the day, both Catholic and secular, and were supported in print by interviews with and comments by those involved.

The altars of the cathedral have not been are not considered in detail in academic theses produced to date. Barry Allom, in his pioneering 1968 assessment of Bishop Grimes in historical context, does not mention the pro-Cathedral altar but when considering the altar commissioned in 1913 implies that Grimes deliberately and almost spitefully set aside Petre’s design (which he does not describe) “and chose one himself”.²⁰ Thus, according to Allom, the stage was set for a subsequent “clash” with “the simple classical Ionic columns”.²¹ Allom’s interpretation will be challenged in this thesis.

Phillipe Hamilton’s 1982 M.A. is a *tour de force* which attempts to catalogue all known, and at the time of his research, some previously unattributed works of Francis Petre, while Diane Wynn-Williams’ M.A. thesis deals solely with Petre’s basilicas.²² Hamilton demonstrates a detailed knowledge of Petre’s 1904 sheet of drawings for the “proposed”

¹⁹ Ibid., p.91.

²⁰ Barry Allom, “Bishop Grimes: his context and contribution to the Catholic Church in Canterbury”, MA Thesis (History), University of Canterbury, 1968. Allom concentrates on New Zealand church history and internal tensions; the financial difficulties of the diocese; Grimes’ problematic relationships with those involved in building the Cathedral; an assessment of his complex character; and his role in the life of the city and the overall success of his episcopacy. See p.98 for Allom’s reference to Petre’s unexecuted altar design.

²¹ Ibid. 98. It must be acknowledged that Allom’s thesis predates the official launch of the Conservation Programme (1970) and its accompanying publicity materials.

²² Philippe Hamilton, “Francis Petre 1947-1918. An investigation into New Zealand architectural biography”, M.A. Thesis (Art History), University of Auckland, 1986. As Hamilton’s study includes the non-basilican churches (for example, the French Gothic St Joseph’s Cathedral in Dunedin) it provides some useful comparisons in the consideration of Petre’s designs for altars: see also Diane Wynn-Williams, “The Basilicas of F.W. Petre”, M.A. Thesis, (Art History), University of Canterbury, 1982.

altar and rightly stresses that this “is enough to make Petre’s intentions perfectly clear”.²³ He attributes the design of the altar installed in 1916 solely to Alfred and Sydney Luttrell, who at that time received most diocesan commissions, Petre being “completely out of favour with the Christchurch administration”.²⁴ He regards the “somewhat ungainly structure” as the work of “clumsy and rather gauche architects” but acknowledges that it was indeed “designed specifically for the space” and was in accord with the tenet that the altar was the main focus of any Catholic church.²⁵ Cassioli’s contribution to the design is completely unacknowledged by Hamilton but will form a major part of this thesis, and Petre’s unexecuted design will also be examined in detail.

Wynn-Williams’ study of the origins and development of the architecture of Petre’s basilicas does not address the altars in any of these buildings, though she is at pains to stress that all his churches, regardless of architectural style, “were extremely successful for the performance of the Catholic liturgy”.²⁶

Christine Stuart’s undergraduate thesis provides a history of the 1970s “refurbishment” of the cathedral.²⁷ She is rather dependent on O’Meeghan’s history for both contextual framework and perspective, and relies on Wynn-Williams’ study of Petre’s basilicas for architectural analysis. She insists that Petre designed a “simple, rectangular stone altar” in stark contrast to the Cassioli altar which is described as “excessively ornamented” and “ostentatious”.²⁸ Her claims will be refuted in this study.

Gavin Brown’s intriguingly titled “Mass Performances”, an interdisciplinary study of twentieth century pre-Vatican II Eucharistic devotions in Catholic life in the archdioceses

²³ Hamilton. Vol.II, pp.340-341. The sheet of finished drawings is held in CCDA.

²⁴ Ibid. See also Ann McEwan, “From cottage to ‘skyscrapers’: the architecture of A.E. and E.S.L. Luttrell in Tasmania and New Zealand”, M.A. Thesis (Art History), University of Canterbury, pp.33,141,194, for evidence of the Luttrells’ support by the diocese, through the influence of Fr. Thomas Price, diocesan Chancellor, who may have heard of their earlier work in Tasmania. In contrast to Hamilton’s airy dismissal of the work of the Luttrells, McEwan considers their Roman Catholic churches designed in New Zealand as “ambitious and successful”, p.33.

²⁵ Hamilton, op. cit., Vol. II, p.341.

²⁶ Wynn-Williams, op. cit. p.131.

²⁷ Christine Stuart, “A History of the Refurbishment of the Cathedral of the Blessed Sacrament”, B.A. Honours Thesis, (Art History), University of Canterbury, 1990. “Refurbishment” is perhaps rather a misleading term for what was far more than a general cleaning, tidying and brightening.

²⁸ Ibid. pp.6-7.

of Melbourne and Adelaide, has been significant in assessing possible methodologies.²⁹ He uses “performance theory” and “framing theory” to demonstrate that multiple ritual forms co-existed and affected the nature of the ritual activity.³⁰ Frames “provide interpretive contexts with which to understand a given event or situation”.³¹ Brown applies a range of frames to the eucharistic performances he assesses. He acknowledges a range of performance contexts within performance frames.³² A range of interpretive contextual frames is also applied in this study of the altars of the Cathedral of the Blessed Sacrament with Brown’s work serving as a reference point rather than a precise model.

Other more recent approaches may also be applied in this study of the cathedral’s high altar. “Material culture studies” in particular, as well as “visual studies” and “thing theory” also proved challenging and useful.³³ Grappling with the latter led to the works of anthropologist Alfred Gell³⁴ and his particular uses of the concept of “agency” in relation to art works. While art history has long used this term to discuss patronage and art-making, with the “agent” being the patron or artist respectively, Gell raises the interesting suggestion that certain objects themselves may be said to have “agency” or the power for symbolic action.³⁵ This could be explored in more depth on another occasion.

The works of Kieran Flanagan, a contemporary Catholic sociologist interested in exploring the relationship between sociology, liturgy and theology, have also proved helpful.³⁶ Flanagan is acutely aware of the many changes which have taken place within

²⁹ Gavin Brown, “Mass Performances: A Study of Eucharistic Ritual in Australian Catholic Culture 1900-1962”, Ph.D. Thesis (History), University of Melbourne, 2003.

³⁰ Ibid., pp.10-11. He examines the *sacerdotal* frame; the *expositional* frame; the *devotional* frame; the *spectacle* frame; and the *congregational* frame. The overriding frame for the pre-Vatican II church is seen as the sacerdotal frame.

³¹ Ibid., p.9.

³² Ibid., p.10, for his discussion of *audience* contexts, *spatial* contexts and *semiotic* contexts.

³³ See for example David Morgan (ed.), *Religion and Material Culture: The Matter of Belief*, Abingdon, Oxford and New York: Routledge, 2010. For “Thing Theory” see for example Bill Brown, “Thing Theory”, *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 28, No. 1, 2001, pp.1-22.

³⁴ [Gell esp Art and Agency, and Art..Anthrop approach...]

³⁵ [Gell re concept of agency...]

³⁶ Kieran Flanagan, *Sociology and Liturgy*, Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire and London: McMillan, 1991; *The Enchantment of Sociology: A Study of Theology and Culture*. Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire and London: McMillan Press Ltd, 1996; *Seen and Unseen*. Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire and London: Palgrave McMillan, 2004.

the Church in the last fifty years and his assessment of their sociological implications is most insightful.³⁷

The pioneering and influential investigations of Katherine Massam into Australian Catholic spirituality and religious practice include consideration of altars in their devotional and liturgical contexts.³⁸

Works from the discipline of “Liturgical studies” were of course crucial to this thesis, particularly in the consideration of a changing liturgical environment after Vatican II.³⁹

Art Historical Approaches

How does all this fit with the traditional concerns of art history, a discipline which has undergone a searching re-examination of its own identity in recent decades?⁴⁰ In what ways will the altar/s be approached?

In Chapter One the altars which preceded the Cassioli altar are discussed, namely the rudimentary altar of wood made by Henley, and the more complex, decorated wooden altar by Kimball and Button. A traditional iconographical approach to the Kimball/Button altar is applied to its painted decorations. Its place in the architectural context of the building and the context of the liturgical life of the diocese, is discussed. This chapter concludes with a brief consideration of Bishop Grimes’ vision of his longed-for cathedral, as seen in his own writings. These reveal not only the scale of his plans, but also clearly show why he considered it so important to have a magnificent building to “frame” the heart of the building, the altar, in the sanctuary.

³⁷ While many of his detailed studies concern the Church in the United Kingdom their relevance to New Zealand Catholic history is beyond doubt.

³⁸ Katherine Massam, *Sacred Threads: Catholic Spirituality in Australia, 1922-1962*, Sydney: University of New South Wales Press, 1996. Note also that Massam served as one of Brown’s doctoral supervisors.

³⁹ The literature for “liturgical studies” is vast. Some examples are: Annibale Bugnini, *The Reform of the Liturgy 1948-1975*, (trans. Matthew J. O’Connell), Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1990; (ed.) Austin Flannery O.P., *Vatican II. The Liturgy Connection*, Dublin: Scepter Books, 1964; Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, (trans. John Saward), San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2000.

⁴⁰ See for example, Vernon Hyde Minor, *Art History’s History*, Eaglewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall Inc., 1994, and Donald Preziosi, *Rethinking Art History: Meditations on a Coy Science*, New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1989.

Chapter Two continues to explore relevant views of the bishop and of the architect, Francis Petre, over the period of the design and construction of the cathedral. It does this by examining selected writings of Bishop Grimes and a drawing by Francis Petre not previously studied (fig. 9), as well as an overlooked but obvious aspect of his detailed plan for the layout of the sanctuary (fig. 8). The placement of the Petre altar as well as its scale, dimensions and design, including its proposed canopy resting on high columns, are all examined in detail, for the first time.

The commissioning of a permanent high altar is examined in Chapter Three. Diocesan and episcopal jubilees in 1912 provided the stimulus for action. Bishop Grimes supplied two English companies with a design suggested by the local architects, the Luttrells, although this did not have to be slavishly followed. The bishop's own ideas about a suitable altar also emerge from this correspondence. For reasons unknown the commission was given to the Italian artist, Giuseppe Cassioli, of Florence. Very detailed instructions for the assembly of the altar, and full descriptions, were sent to Christchurch, as well as high quality photographs of all components (figs. 15-22). The artist was involved in all aspects of production, and stressed the high quality of the materials used.

Giuseppe Cassioli is a sculptor and painter quite unknown in New Zealand. He had a long and successful career, based in Florence. He received the Christchurch commission after several prestigious sculptural successes in Florence (figs. 13, 14) and other cities. His oeuvre is outlined in Chapter Four and his wide-ranging career placed in artistic context. He was proficient in a range of media and styles, able to draw on sources from many periods. Three examples of his work, including the Christchurch high altar, are used to demonstrate his painstaking working methods, confident use of sources, and meticulous concern that each commission be entirely appropriate for its setting.

The altar incorporated numerous relief sculptures, both in marble and in gilt bronze. Their style and iconography and possible sources will be considered, including late nineteenth/early 20th century Italian sculpture, an area of study which seems to have hitherto received no attention at all in Australia or New Zealand.⁴¹ In Gavin Brown's terms, these are contextual frames to be applied when analysing the individual panels and

⁴¹ In fact very little information has been found in English, apart from an occasional account in a contemporary journal e.g.

the overall form of the altar. The critical reception and appreciation of the altar when installed in also examined.

Chapter Five begins with affirmations of the Cassioli altar from subsequent decades: publications and archival records of diocesan events and commemorative objects furnish examples. During the cathedral conservation programme (1970-1974), however, the altar was either ignored or condemned as inappropriate. It was dismissed as being unsuited to the architecture of the building, and equally unsuited to post Vatican II liturgical requirements.⁴² It is often omitted from the conservation appeal's publicity materials, both written and pictorial. Together with additional archival documentation, these are examined in detail in this chapter. Coverage of the damning of the altar in local and national media is also assessed. In the "frame" of public perception and reception, the media repeatedly stress that the altar, usually termed the "baroque" and/or "kitset" altar, is out of keeping with the architect's original intention.⁴³ These accounts are compared to the information known about the architect's plans for an altar of his own design, which are discussed in Chapter Two. The Cassioli altar was also, in the 1970s, summarily dismissed not only as inappropriate, but also of little artistic merit: in one memorable and lengthy article at the height of the controversy over its planned removal, it was referred to in the opening paragraph as "monstrous".⁴⁴

The monumental altar designed by the modernist architect Miles Warren, installed in 1974 after the complete removal of the Cassioli altar, is discussed in Chapter Five. Its simple form was based on geometric forms and earlier works based on these, for example the distinctive designs of Boulée, as Warren has acknowledged.⁴⁵ The altar was conceived as part of a larger scheme for the sanctuary (figs. 33, 34). This included seating and a pulpit, all designed by Warren. The location of the Warren altar is also discussed in this chapter: it was brought forward in the sanctuary, closer to the congregation. The new altar had no reredos or tabernacle, the reserved Sacrament being relocated in a newly created Blessed Sacrament Chapel.

⁴² [damned as being liturgically unsuitable]

⁴³ [eg "baroque" 1970s ref...]

⁴⁴ ["monstrous" article 1970s re altar]

⁴⁵ [from autobiog of Miles Warren...] re geom forms and infl of Boulée.

While acknowledging Caroline Walker Bynum's convincing warnings on the dangers of comparison,⁴⁶ comparisons of the successive high altars do in fact form an integral part of this study, and will be summarized in its conclusion.

⁴⁶ Caroline W. Bynum. "Avoiding the Tyranny of Morphology: or Why Compare?" in *History of Religions*. Vol. 53, No. 4 (May 2014), pp.341-368.

Chapter One

The predecessors of the cathedral altar: the Henley and Kimbell/Button altars in context

The Church of the Blessed Sacrament: 1860-1887

From 1860 a hastily-erected and humble wooden structure served as the first church of the growing Catholic congregation on the allocated Barbadoes Street site. According to the memoirs of the pioneer, J.J. Wilson, “an altar was also improvised by Mr. Henley”, although this altar is not described.¹ The church was named the Church of the Blessed Sacrament by Rev. Fr. Chataigner, a French Marist sent to the new mission.²

In 1864 the prominent local architect Benjamin Mountfort was engaged by Fr. Chataigner to design a more substantial replacement.³ Its dark volcanic stone walls lined with brick, with a timber frame above. The doorways were of Governors Bay yellow stone, and a tiled roof was supported by huge timber arches.⁴ The whole was a striking polychromatic mix of stone and wood, and became an instant landmark “with its high-peaked nave, roof, and quaint turret spire”.⁵ It was consecrated by Bishop Viard of Wellington in December 1864, “under the title of the Most Blessed Sacrament”.⁶

At the opening Vespers, its high altar was “decorated with six handsome Candelabra furnished with lofty wax tapers and vases of flowers.”⁷ The altar constructed by Henley

¹ J.J. Wilson, in *The Church in New Zealand. Memoirs of the Early Days*, Dunedin: The New Zealand Tablet Printing and Publishing Co. Ltd., 1910. p.7. Although Wilson’s memoirs are generally regarded as at times unreliable, in this instance he notes on p.79 that his source, Mr. P. Henley of Leeston, was present when the building was finally demolished after a fire in 1903, having served the congregation as church, school, residence for the Marist Brothers, parish library, meeting place for church societies and gathering place for parish discussions and decisions.

² *New Zealand Tablet*, Volume IX, Issue 428, 24 June 1881, p. 19.

³ Ian Lochhead, *A Dream of Spires*, Christchurch, Canterbury University Press, 1999, p. 183.

⁴ See M. Hanrahan, *A Suitable Temple*, Ashburton, Cathedral of the Blessed Sacrament Centennial Committee, 2004, p.17, for a detailed description of the building.

⁵ *Lyttelton Times*, Volume XXI, Issue 1249, 14 June 1864, p.3.

⁶ *New Zealand Tablet*, Vol. XXVIII, Issue 15, 12 April.1900, p.4

⁷ The candelabra were believed to be the gift of Fr. Chataigner. Such patronage by the clergy was not uncommon. Ibid.

was presumably used when the Mountfort church was opened; at any rate no record of the construction of a new altar has been found.

Within ten years the church was again too small.⁸ Mountfort's revised plans included transepts, a new sanctuary and the lengthening of the church,⁹ but no design for the new altar installed in the enlarged church from 1876 has survived. This altar was in fact constructed by a Mr. Kimbell "without architectural advice" and painted and ornamented by a Mr. Button, the whole forming "a very chaste and elegant work of art".¹⁰

It is interesting to note that although the altar is the *locus* for the most significant sacred action in the church, the Mass, it was not the object of lavish expenditure or apparent priority at this date. While the church included, for example, imported life-size terracotta statues of the Saviour and the Virgin in the transept, and two large terracotta angels in the sanctuary¹¹, the high altar on which the sacrifice of the Mass took place was of painted wood, a modest work of local craftsmen.¹²

An Iconographical Approach to the Kibell/Button Altar

Despite its rather humble, local origins, a traditional art historical investigation into the meaning of its richly layered theological program, may be attempted. A contemporary account describes it as follows:

The front of the altar shows treble arches, with carved and gilded columns. In the centre arch is the Lamb on the Book, with the Seven Seals beneath; on the right is the Sacred Heart of Jesus, with a crown of thorns and flames of Divine Love in gilt. On the left hand side is the Heart of the Virgin, pierced by a sword, and with a crown and general gilt surroundings similar to those on the right arch. Upon the table is the Tabernacle, upon the door of which is the figure of a pelican in bas relief, feeding its young with its blood, and surmounted by a throne for the cross.¹³

⁸ Hanrahan, op. cit. p.17.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ *Star*, Issue 2616, 12 August 1876, p.3. The roles of Kimbell and Button in the building programme are not more precisely known.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Compare the situation in Wellington, where in 1879 an elaborate marble altar, imported from France, was consecrated at St. Mary's Cathedral, Wellington. See *New Zealand Tablet*, Volume 26, Issue 349, 26 December 1879, p.7.

¹³ *Star*, 12 August 1876, p.3.

Figure 2 shows the Kimbell/Button altar but the details in the published description and following analysis cannot be seen in the reproduction.¹⁴ It is not known who selected the images on the altar frontal; presumably Button was directed by the clergy.

The Lamb

The image of the Lamb is open to a number of symbolic interpretations.¹⁵ Gertrud Schiller discerns three types of image: the sacrificial Lamb (*Agnus Dei*), the Easter Lamb (*Agnus paschalis*) and the Apocalyptic Lamb (*Agnus victor*).¹⁶ Scriptures such as Isaiah 53.7 and John 1.29 establish a biblical connection between the Old Testament sacrifice of an innocent lamb and the future redemptive death of the Redeemer.¹⁷ The Apocalyptic Lamb in contrast “symbolizes Christ’s eternal victory and his worldwide sovereignty” as recorded in Revelation 5.6f, 14.1f and 21.23.¹⁸

The altar frontal Lamb could therefore be seen as a conflation of the *Agnus Dei* and *Agnus victor* types. It depicts the Lamb lying with a cross which creates a “cross nimbus” impression behind its head, reinforcing the link to the *Agnus Dei*, the sacrificial death of Christ as Redeemer on the cross. The horizontal scroll on which the Lamb reclines seems also to reference the Throne of Revelation, often depicted in its entirety in such images.

Natasha and Anthony O’Hear have recently asserted that by the 20th century such depictions of the Apocalyptic Lamb have become quite decontextualized, “with the intricacy and complexity of the original narrative all but lost”.¹⁹ For André Grabar, an

¹⁴ When studied under high magnification, however, the original photograph does show that the description in the *Star* is correct.

¹⁵ See Goran Hermeren, *Representation and Meaning in the Visual Arts: A Study in the Methodology of Iconography and Iconology*, Lund, Berlingska Boktryckeriet, 1969. Hermeren, p.91, would see the Lamb as an open rather than an example of ‘disguised’ symbol, meaning that its contents point overtly to its meaning. The book and its seals refer to the biblical Book of Revelation, and in this case the presence of a large cross makes a crucifixion connection explicit. In any event, however, symbolism has to be learned, as Hermeren points out on p. 81.

¹⁶ Gertrud Schiller, *Iconography of Christian Art*. Volume 2. The Passion of Jesus Christ. Translated by Janet Seligman. London: Lund Humphries, 1972. 117-118.

¹⁷ Schiller, p.117.

¹⁸ Ibid. p.118. Jennifer Speake traces this development in the Old and New Testaments in J. Speake, *The Dent Dictionary of Symbols in Christian Art*, London: J.M. Dent, 1994.

¹⁹ Natasha O’Hear and Anthony O’Hear. *Picturing the Apocalypse: The Book of Revelation in the Arts over Two Millennia*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2015, p.66. This is in stark contrast to the earlier extensive narrative cycles they discuss, for example the medieval Apocalypse manuscripts.

image of the Lamb can be more nuanced than a depiction of the human Christ.²⁰ There are obviously multiple “approaches” to images such as those found on the Kimball/Button altar.

The *Agnus Dei*, long part of the Mass text, would have been very familiar to the congregation at Barbadoes Street.²¹ The image of the Lamb would also have been recognised from a host of variants in private devotional material, as well as in churches elsewhere.

The sacrificed Lamb may also be interpreted eucharistically. The bloody sacrifice is repeated in an unbloody form at each Mass, and Christ, the Lamb, is present at Mass in the consecrated bread and wine.. It is however the “Lamb on the Book with the Seven Seals beneath” which is the dominant image on the frontal, being centrally placed and larger than the flanking Hearts.²² This image of sacrifice can also be linked to that of the pelican prepared to sacrifice herself to feed her young, depicted in the tabernacle above, although this would normally have been veiled.²³ Such imagery features in Grimes’ many sermons with their detailed explications of biblical texts, including those in Revelation.²⁴

The images of the Lamb and flanking Hearts are further highlighted against gold-painted circular medallions fringed with tongues of flame. The Hearts of Jesus and Mary were very popular devotions at this time.²⁵ The flames of one and the piercing sword of the

²⁰ André Grabar. *Christian Iconography: A Study of Its Origins*. The A.W. Mellon Lectures in the Fine Arts. 1961, The National Gallery of Art, Washington D.C., Bollingen Series XXXV – 10, Princeton, N.J., Princeton University Press, 1968.

²¹ Schiller. 118. The text is: *Agnus Dei, qui tollis peccata mundi, miserere nobis. Agnus Dei, qui tollis peccata mundi, miserere nobis, dona nobis pacem*. Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world, have mercy on us. Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world, have mercy on us. Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world, grant us peace.

²² *Star*, 12 August 1876, p.3. Note that the windows in place in the chancel, when the Mountfort church was opened in 1864, included “medallions of the Agnus Dei, and the chalice and grapes”: *Press*, 8 October 1864, p.2.

²³ Veiling denotes the sacred nature of its contents, the reserved consecrated hosts. It may also reference the veiled “Holy of Holies” in the biblical Temple in Jerusalem.

²⁴ A large number of Bishop Grimes’ sermons are held in several uncatalogued boxes in CCDA. They are mostly typed on small folded sheets, presumably for use in the pulpit, and grouped by topic in contemporary card covers tied with tape.

²⁵ In the early 1960s large framed Victorian prints of the Sacred and Immaculate Hearts were still hanging over the bed of the author’s Irish grandmother in country Australia.

other serve to easily distinguish that of Christ, burning with love for mankind, and that of Mary, grieving for her crucified Son.

Painted bunches of grapes and grape leaves in the arched compartments of the altar's reredos complete the iconographic programme, referencing the consecrated wine of the Eucharist, transformed into the Blood of Christ.²⁶

1878 - The Church is Extended Again

It was further "enlarged and beautified" by Rev. Fathers Chervier and especially by Fr. Ginaty.²⁷ When reopened on July 28, 1878, it could seat 1,000. As noted by Hanrahan, Mountfort's revised design had now been "totally buried" (fig. 1).²⁸

Further internal modifications were made under Fr. Ginaty's direction in 1884, and were fully described in *The Press*.²⁹ Sanctuary rails, locally cast and "painted in gold and varnished", now marked off the enlarged and reconfigured sanctuary and three new lamps "of very rich design" were hung in front of the high altar (fig. 2).³⁰ The 1876 Kimball/Button altar remained *in situ*. When Bishop Grimes arrived in 1888 the church was "acknowledged one of the most devotional if not *the* most devotional looking church in the Colony".³¹ The highly decorated sanctuary depicted in Fig. 2 includes nine stained glass windows and many decorative banners; candelabra both on the altar and at either side; and potted plants and flowers similarly arranged, including on the altar steps. The altar is shown in context here, and the degree and type of decoration of the sanctuary would change with the liturgical seasons and special celebrations.

The relatively simple wooden altar with its three pointed arches framed by mouldings, the central arch wider than the others, and with what appear to be double moulded pilasters at the outer edges, can be more closely examined. The whole appears brightly painted by Button, with elements of the arches and pilasters picked out in lighter tones or perhaps painted gold.

²⁶ These are not mentioned in the description published in the *Star*, 12 August 1876, p.3.

²⁷ *New Zealand Tablet*, Vol. XXVIII. Issue 15. 12 April 1900. 4.

²⁸ Hanrahan, 17.

²⁹ *The Press*, 13 September 1884, p.3.

³⁰ The rails were made by Messrs. Scott Bros. and Co. Press, 13 September, 1884, p.3.

³¹ *New Zealand Tablet*, Vol. XXIV, Issue 40, 29 January, 1897, p.23.

Above the veiled tabernacle, a brass crucifix on a high base is surmounted by what appears to be a round hanging metal canopy from which are suspended swags and a longer curtain of light-coloured fabric. When the Blessed Sacrament was exposed for veneration by the faithful at Benediction or Exposition would be placed where the crucifix stands, and hundreds of candles would have blazed in an impressive display.

The painted and metallic surfaces in the sanctuary gleam with reflected light and the whole gives an intended impression is one of rich display, with the maximum possible decoration in a range of media. The richly embroidered cloth banners and carpeted altar steps increase the range of surface textures, while at the same time reinforcing the sense of identity and belonging experienced by the congregation as they represented various organized devotional groups within the parish.³²

The wooden altar itself has a simple form and is relatively modest in its decoration. It seems in proportion to the sanctuary space.³³ Figure 2, however, shows only the sanctuary, and perhaps only part of that, giving the misleading impression of a rather small and intimate space.

Figure 1.. shows much more of the interior and gives a rather different impression. The sanctuary is placed in the context of the whole church interior. Here a highly decorated side altar is seen on the left of the sanctuary, and numerous freestanding statues of saints add to the overall decorative scheme. The high altar, visible between the framing arches of the nave, has much less visual impact. Although centrally placed in the most prominent position of the sanctuary, it must compete with its complex architectural and decorative surroundings for the attention of the viewer.

³² See Lyndon Fraser, *To Tara via Holyhead, Irish Catholic Immigrants in Nineteenth-century Christchurch*, Auckland: Auckland University Press, 1997, support and reinforcement of Irish identity, for example p.102: "newcomers tended to cluster strongly around the Church of the Blessed Sacrament, an institution which had become the critical locus of Catholic identity", p.110-111, 114.

³³ Its basic shape, rectangular and box-like, very often with attached gradines or a separate reredos, remained the norm for Catholic altars until the 1960s, after Vatican II.

Although pictorial sources showing the interior of the Pro-Cathedral are limited, there is a wealth of printed information available in the mass media of the day.³⁴ This is not restricted to Catholic publications, but is also common in the secular press of Christchurch and beyond.³⁵ These surprisingly detailed descriptions provide a wealth of information about the decoration of the various spaces and their use in various ceremonies, including large processions.³⁶ In 1884 the *Press* and *Star* included the high altar of the twice-enlarged church in their descriptions of Easter decorations in Christchurch churches. While the form of the altar is not specifically described, both newspapers emphasize the beauty and tastefulness of its decoration using ferns, flowers and native plants.³⁷ The sanctuary walls were also apparently decorated with crimson cloth which threw the impressive candelabra and the altar into high relief.³⁸

The church of the Blessed Sacrament becomes the pro-cathedral: 1887-1904

With the creation of the new diocese and appointment of the first bishop, the church underwent a change of status. With Bishop Grimes' approval it was now known as the pro-cathedral, in the expectation that an appropriate cathedral would replace it in the future.

In 1887 Christmas was celebrated after the appointment of Bishop Grimes erected but before his arrival in early 1888. Contemporary descriptions note that the sanctuary now has an episcopal throne and a new pulpit: the altar is “studded with massive candelabras”.³⁹ In 1895, when St. John the Baptist was named titular patron of the diocese, following an initiative of Bishop Grimes, the church was festooned in red and white; the high altar was decorated with flowers and “hundreds of candles and was surrounded with fairy lamps of various colours”; and Chinese lanterns illuminated the

³⁴ Photographs in the CDA focus on the exterior, and particularly on the resiting of the building in 1900. A very small number of photographs of the interior are also available and provide the main source of visual information.

³⁵ For example, the *Press* and the *Star* in Christchurch and the *Timaru Herald*.

³⁶ For example, *Press*, Vol. XXIX, Issue 3999, 20 May 1878, p.2, has a lengthy description of the “very impressive ceremony” involving five hundred children, in honour of the Blessed Virgin Mary, “the first of the kind in Christchurch”. This report includes what the children wore, carried and sang.

³⁷ *Press*, Vol. XL, Issue 5798, 14 April, 1884, p.3, and the almost identical account in the *Star*, Issue 4975, 14 April, 1884, p.3.

³⁸ *Ibid*. See also *New Zealand Tablet*, Vol XVII, Issue 3, 10 May 1889, p.27 for the use of black draperies in the sanctuary on the occasion of the Solemn Requiem Mass for Father Garin.

³⁹ *Star*, Issue 6119, 26 December 1887, p.4. Note that Bishop Grimes did not in fact arrive until February 1, 1888, although he had been appointed bishop of the new diocese in May 1887.

approaches to the church.⁴⁰ By 1897 the Pro-Cathedral had been fully renovated inside and out, with a new fence and gates.⁴¹

Bishop Grimes' 1899 Lenten Pastoral: the nature of and need for a cathedral

Bishop Grimes, after an extended period overseas in 1898-1899, unveiled his plan to build a cathedral. In his lengthy Lenten Pastoral (letter) of 1899 he explains what a cathedral is, and why a new building is urgently needed.⁴² This was read and displayed throughout the diocese. While it does not specifically mention a high altar, it stresses the magnificence of his proposed cathedral and its contents. It creates an image of the “frame” in which the altar is to be set, and for this reason it is useful to briefly examine its structure and contents. It is typical of Bishop Grimes' letters and sermons: filled with biblical references and contemporary anecdotes, it engagingly involves the listener/reader in the grand scheme.

He aims to “build a temple to the name of the Lord our God”, a work undertaken “not for man but for God Himself”.⁴³ That a cathedral is primarily for God, not for man, is a recurring motif throughout his writings. He justifies the “lavish expense” then outlines the origin of church building, and explains why a Catholic church is always more than just a building.⁴⁴ Scripture proved that man has a deep need for churches, for God had always had special places “where the Almighty would be honored in a more especial manner”.⁴⁵

Bishop Grimes stresses that every church must have a pulpit for the Word of God, an altar and a confessional. All require a priesthood - and a priesthood requires a temple.⁴⁶ Here Grimes treats all three with equal reverence; the altar is not given priority. It is useful to remember this when the question of a new altar is raised.

⁴⁰ *Star*, Issue 5292, 24 June 1895, p.1.

⁴¹ *New Zealand Tablet*, Vol XXIV, Issue 40, 29 January 1897, p.23. Compare however the account in the *Auckland Star*, 26 October, 1897, p.2, which stresses the “signs of approaching decay” of the more than thirty years old wooden pro-cathedral.

⁴² *Pastoral of the Bishop of Christchurch for the Year of Grace 1899*, Christchurch.

⁴³ *Ibid.*p3.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ *Ibid.* p.4.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.* p.5.

He also refers to biblical precedents and the care taken by God over these structures.⁴⁷ All was of the highest quality and the whole community was involved in the construction: God made it clear he would dwell there in the midst of the people.⁴⁸ Similarly Christ would remain with the people of Christchurch in the bread and wine of the Eucharist..⁴⁹

A cathedral must be magnificent. While daily life should be lived moderately and simply, “we cannot display too great riches and magnificence when preparing a house of an altar to His honour”.⁵⁰ Just as the whole community was involved in building a medieval cathedral, so his whole diocese would be involved in the building a “royal residence” for God.⁵¹ Every new church is “a sure refuge, a happy home wherein Jesus dwells night and day beneath the sacramental veils”.⁵²

He stresses that a cathedral is where the “Pope or Patriarch, Metropolitan or Bishop have their permanent throne or episcopal chair”.⁵³ Moreover, a cathedral belongs to all and all “should feel at home in it”.⁵⁴ The people love to hear the Word of God preached there by their bishop, and to attend the prescribed ceremonies carried out “with all the possible splendour of her beautiful Liturgy”.⁵⁵ A cathedral must, therefore, be larger and more beautiful than any other church in the diocese. It must be worthy of God, and also of their chief city. It is also urgently needed, for the present Pro-cathedral, made of wood, has “several times in recent years most narrowly escaped being burnt to the ground”.⁵⁶ It would obviously require a suitably magnificent altar, although Grimes does not mention this specifically.

Pope Leo XIII had recently encouragement Bishop Grimes in person.⁵⁷ This includes the Pope in the plan to build a cathedral; by extension, it is presented as God’s plan.

⁴⁷ Ibid. He refers to the tabernacle erected by Moses and the Temple of Solomon erected on the same site 500 years later, citing Exodus 24.

⁴⁸ Ibid. p.6.

⁴⁹ Ibid. p.7.

⁵⁰ Ibid. p.8.

⁵¹ Ibid. p.8.

⁵² Ibid. p.9.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid. p.11.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

Bishop Grimes' recent overseas fundraising efforts had raised a little over £3,000. His own poor priests had promised an additional £1,000.⁵⁸ He himself now pledged a further £1,000, to be paid in stages, though he was "far from being a wealthy prelate".⁵⁹ His extensive travels and declaration of his personal financial commitment confirm his lead agency in the proposal.

The cathedral, which will retain the pro-cathedral's dedication to the Blessed Sacrament will also be an evangelical witness to the Faith.⁶⁰ Many "of our dear separated brethren" are already drawn to "our beautiful ceremonies" and more would come "had we room for them and better means of carrying out the beautiful liturgical offices".⁶¹ "This fair province of ours" is about to celebrate its Golden Jubilee, and "As patriotic citizens too, you will be eager to make this, our Cathedral, an ornament to the City of the Plains."⁶² All are expected to contribute:

The poorest in our diocese will deem it a duty to give five or more pounds in annual instalments."⁶³

The scene is set: the people of the diocese of Christchurch will rise to the occasion, inspired by the example of their dedicated bishop. He has educated them about the nature and purpose of a cathedral, which cannot function without an altar. The nature of that altar in the proposed majestic building is explored in the next chapter, and the relationship of the high altar in the context of the sanctuary considered. The intentions and preferences of the cathedral's architect, Francis Petre, in this matter will also be discussed. As these have often been distorted in more recent times it is important to thoroughly assess the information available.

⁵⁸ Ibid. p.13.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid. p.14.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid.

Chapter Two

1900 - 1905: The Altar in the Mind of the Bishop and the Architect

As these years are treated in detail by both O’Meeghan and Hanrahan a detailed repetition is not required here.¹ Rather, this chapter will demonstrate that the appointed architect, Francis Petre, had a very clear vision for a new high altar for the cathedral. His original plan for the cathedral (fig. 8) very clearly shows where he intended the altar to be positioned, and a large and detailed extant pencil drawing (fig. 9) presents his preferred design. The plan and drawing form the basis for discussion of his altar design.

Bishop Grimes did not ever publish specific information concerning the planned design or placement of the cathedral’s altar but always regarded it as an integral part of a larger whole, rather than an isolated object. A paper on the Liturgy which Grimes delivered in Melbourne in October 1904, since overlooked, illustrates this very well. In this chapter, then, two contemporary documents not previously examined will be explored to illustrate the mind of the bishop and the mind of the architect in their respective approaches to the altar.² Additional writings by Bishop Grimes supplement the discussion.

The chapter concludes by returning to the Kimbell/Button altar, for it was this altar that was installed in the new cathedral when it opened in 1905. It can be seen in its new architectural frame in Figure 4 in which it seems a rather unprepossessing object in a very magnificent new setting with a very different architectural style and scale.

Bishop Grimes: his fund-raising overseas: the need for a cathedral

Although his plan to raise funds for a cathedral had not been made public before he left Christchurch in May 1897, returning in January 1899, cathedral fundraising dominated his time away from the diocese had not in fact been formally activated at home before he left.³ His efforts were reported on in the London *Tablet*.⁴ He printed an appeal circular

¹ O’Meeghan, pp.217-243 and Hanrahan, pp.24-67.

² Petre’s plan has been published on several occasions, although its implications have been missed.

³ His hopes were public knowledge however: Fr Le Menant des Chenais, for example, aimed to raise a million pennies for the task before the bishop’s return. See O’Meeghan, p.218, and Hanrahan, p.24. Both point out that there is no evidence of the success of this ambitious project.

⁴ *Tablet*, 22 October, 1898, p.35, reports on his peaching at the Pro-Cathedral, Kensington, where he continued “the appeal he is making in the Metropolis for his faraway diocese.”

headed “Our Missionaries in New Zealand”,⁵, and used this extensively.⁶ This crafted no doubt contributed to his raising of over £3,000, of which £800 came from Ireland.⁷

At the formal reception held in the pro-cathedral on his return, Grimes raised the question of building a cathedral, telling his largely Irish flock that it was the Irish who had encouraged him to erect a building more worthy than the present pro-cathedral!⁸ He went on to use his Easter Pastoral of 1899 to convince his people of the importance of having a suitably impressive cathedral, and to prepare them for the huge effort involved, as discussed in the previous chapter.⁹ His fund-raising enterprises at home were to range from a spectacular bazaar in 1900 to the on-going presentation of lectures illustrated by his large collection of magic lantern slides.¹⁰

Which Architect and What Kind of Cathedral?

The works of the architect/engineer Francis Petre would have been well known to Bishop Grimes. Having just returned to Christchurch via Wellington, he would have seen the work in progress on Petre’s Sacred Heart Basilica. Petre had earlier designed the Gothic cathedral in Dunedin as well as St. Patrick’s Basilica in South Dunedin, which was opened in 1898. Grimes himself had opened Petre’s (incomplete) St. Patrick’s basilica in Oamaru in 1894.¹¹ Although a competition for the cathedral design had been mooted this did not eventuate and Petre was appointed to the position of architect for the new cathedral in Christchurch.¹²

⁵ “Our Missionaries in New Zealand. Appeal from the Bishop of Christchurch. The Story of His Diocese.” Undated. CCDA.

⁶ It was also sent to the London *Tablet* according to the *New Zealand Tablet*, which published the text in full: *New Zealand Tablet*, 5 November 1897, p.25.

⁷ O’Meeghan, 219, and Hanrahan, 23-24 discuss the extent of his travels in Europe and the return journey. He preached nine times during one Sunday in New York!

⁸ *Star*, Issue 6381, 11 January 1899, 4. According to the account in *The Press*, Vol. LVI, Issue 10242, 11 January 1899, 6, the suggestion came from “a brother bishop in Catholic Ireland”, adding even more status to the idea.

⁹ O’Meeghan, pp.217-218. O’Meeghan, p.225, uses the term “collegiality” here, although Grimes does not use this terminology.

¹⁰ See O’Meeghan, p.226 and Hanrahan, p.31.

¹¹ O’Meeghan, 221, surprisingly omits any reference to St Patrick’s Oamaru in his list of buildings by Petre which Grimes would have known. This basilica is clearly the closest in design to the Cathedral of the Blessed Sacrament. While Hanrahan, p.26, does mention the Oamaru basilica in this context, the date of Bishop Grimes’ sermon at the opening service is incorrectly printed as 1884, some years before his arrival in the new diocese. See the theses of Wynn-Williams and Hamilton for detailed analysis of all Petre’s basilicas.

¹² *New Zealand Tablet*, Vol. XXVII, Issue 48, 30 November 1899, p.6.

In his letter to Grimes of February 6 1899 Petre includes an often- reproduced marginal sketch of an early idea for a design for the cathedral in Christchurch.¹³ It is interesting to note the size and placement of the altar in this rudimentary sketch of the building's key features. In the sketch, the altar is merely indicated by a rectangle towards the rear of the sanctuary. It is on a raised platform and is approachable by triple steps which envelop it on three sides, with room for clergy and assistants to move around it, as required. In combination with its steps it dominates the proposed sanctuary.¹⁴

Petre recommended a basilica rather than a Gothic cathedral, for three reasons: relative size required to seat a large congregation, susceptibility to earthquake damage, and cost: "You want size, dignity and permanency at a minimum of cost therefore you must give up the idea of gothic . . . and take the Roman Basilica as your model."¹⁵

In 1900 Bishop Grimes started local fundraising, having formed a Building Committee. He repeated his proposals in his Easter Pastoral of 1901.¹⁶ The foundation stone was laid on February 10, 1901, by Archbishop Carr of Melbourne.¹⁷ A week earlier both Archbishop Carr and Bishop Grimes had attended the opening and dedication of Petre's new Sacred Heart Basilica in Wellington and the Christchurch pro-cathedral had been moved in its entirety to a nearby site on convent land in Ferry Road and was rededicated in July 1901 for continued use as the pro-cathedral.¹⁸

¹³ Letter of Francis Petre to Bishop Grimes, Box Cathedral Building 1899-1905, CCDA. The sketch is reproduced in O'Meeghan, p.222, and Hanrahan, p.27.

¹⁴ Although Petre has labelled some portions of this sketch his handwriting unfortunately rivals that of Bishop Grimes in its illegibility.

¹⁵ Letter of Francis Petre to Bishop Grimes, CCDA. As discussed by Hanrahan, p.26, there is no evidence that Grimes definitely wanted a Gothic building: what prompted Petre's comment here is unknown.

¹⁶ "Pastoral of the Bishop of Christchurch for the Year of Grace 1901." Christchurch.

¹⁷ *New Zealand Tablet*, Vol. XXVII, Issue 48, 30 November 1899, 6, reports that by late November Bishop Carr had accepted the invitation to lay the stone. This issue is discussed by O'Meeghan, p.224, and Hanrahan, p.37. In Melbourne, it was reported in *The Advocate*, 9 March 1901, 19. Cardinal Moral was still expected to attend in the report in the *Timaru Herald*, Vol. LXIV, Issue 3321, 23 July 1900, p.3, and the *New Zealand Tablet*, Vol. XXVIII, Issue 49, 6 December 1900, p.5, much closer to the day of the ceremony. His sudden unavailability was attributed to "important business" in the *Press*, Vol. LVIII, Issue 10886, 11 February, 1901, p.3, which includes a detailed account of the laying of the foundation stone.

¹⁸ *Timaru Herald*, Vol. LXIV, Issue 3846, 5 February 1901, p.3. Also *Press*, Vol. LVIII, Issue 10886, 11 February 1901, p.3. See also O'Meeghan, pp.228-229, and Hanrahan, pp.29.

In his 1902 Lenten Pastoral Grimes expects all to contribute as the cathedral is to be “the parish church for all”.¹⁹ It will be one of the “handsomest and noblest structures in the colony”, as is only fitting given its purpose.²⁰ It will be in the Roman Renaissance style which is not only stronger and cheaper than Gothic, but:

emphasizes the fact that the church and especially the altar, is primarily built for the Adorable Sacrifice. In it the Sanctuary and the High Altar form, as they obviously should, the principal feature of the whole edifice.²¹

This is an important passage for it is a rare example of Bishop Grimes expressing an architectural preference concerning the altar. The altar is the key to the building, and Petre’s basilica plan will give it due prominence.²² The implication is that in Gothic churches the altar is often very much further away from the congregation. This was not one of the reasons put forward by Petre in favour of Renaissance over Gothic, and perhaps indicates some independent research and reasoning on Grimes’ part.

The Cathedral Fund Card

A card was produced for donors on which to record both the amount promised and progressive payments made. It includes an image of the interior of a basilica, presumably to inspire potential donors by giving them an indication of what will be built. This interior appears to be that of the 5th century Christian basilica of Santa Sabina in Rome. The coffered ceiling and sanctuary apse with freestanding altar recall Petre’s plan for the Cathedral of the Blessed Sacrament, although there are obvious differences as well.²³

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

²² See Wynn-Williams, pp.96,108, 10 for more detailed discussion of Petre’s light-filled, deep sanctuary, although she does not address his design for a high altar and canopy.

²³ The nave columns in Santa Sabina, for example, support an arched colonnade, but there are no arches in this position in the Christchurch building. The account of the opening of the cathedral in the *Tablet*, 16 February, 1905, p.7, notes that the cathedral’s classic colonnade has “a more sparing use of the arch than is found in most examples of this style.”

The card does not show Petre's design for the cathedral interior, nor does it depict one of his earlier basilicas: perhaps promises were sought before Petre's plans were actually finalized and a detailed image was available.²⁴

Petre's Drawings : Cathedral and High Altar

By February 1900 Bishop Grimes had received preliminary plans and costings from Petre.²⁵ A remarkably complete set of detailed plans, drawn to scale, are held in the diocesan archives.²⁶ These include the often-reproduced Drawing No. 2, signed by Petre and W. Jamieson, the builder, and dated 11 February, 1901 (Figure 8)²⁷. It shows the architect's original plan but this is not what was finally constructed.²⁸

Drawing No. 2 is crucial for this thesis, as it indicates the form and placement of Petre's high altar, something which has never been examined. The scheme had developed considerably from the marginal sketch in his letter to Bishop Grimes of almost exactly two years earlier, both in scale and detail. In O'Meehan's well-chosen words, "the original sketch exploded".²⁹ Now four massive yet hollow piers in the sanctuary apse supported four enormous arches on which the whisper gallery, dome-room and dome rested. Petre chose to place the dome over the sanctuary rather than the more usual location of the crossing.³⁰

The Planned Placement of Petre's Altar

Petre's altar was to nestle in the rear third of the apse, and is approached by a series of steps, placing it at a considerably higher than the sanctuary floor on which the episcopal

²⁴ This is obviously speculation. The card is held in the photographic collection of CCDA, photo number 2865, storage file 6/52/2865, described as "Donation Card". 7.5 cm x 11.25 cm. It is undated.

²⁵ Hanrahan, op.cit., p.32, assumes that these would not have included decorative or construction details, but he acknowledges that nonetheless their production within twelve weeks of Petre's appointment as architect was a considerable achievement.

²⁶ Plan drawers. CCDA.

²⁷ Drawing No. 2. Catholic Cathedral Christchurch NZ. This is reproduced in Hanrahan, p.36 and in various Cathedral publications, including the 1970s conservation appeal booklet, to be discussed in Chapter Five.

²⁸ For reasons of cost the scale of the building was reduced and the proposed crypt was eliminated. The stairs to the west gallery were also changed and some of the areas designated for confessionals were used instead for side chapels.

²⁹ O'Meehan, op. cit., p.223.

³⁰ He had previously used this device in other works, for example, the Oamaru basilica. As Wynn-Williams, points out on p.75 this brings more light to the altar.

throne is set.³¹ After ascending these steps and crossing the rectangular “apron” the clergy would then have to negotiate three more steps of a second platform on which the altar proper rests. The steps continue in a curve behind the altar, echoing the curve of the outer steps on which seven Ionic columns, each 14 feet (4.26m) high and 1’8”(0.5m) in diameter, are placed. The total area is given as 60 feet (18.28m) by 28 feet (8.5m), accessible from all four sides.

In his 1902 Lenten Pastoral Bishop Grimes comments that this “circular row of clustering columns will form a most appropriate background to the high altar (fig.6).”³² The future impact of this view was considerable: it was often quoted and used to give the columns a privileged position when rearrangement of the sanctuary was considered in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

In Petre’s design there is room to move between the curved steps of the altar platform and the outer colonnade, although there is very much more space available for movement in front of the altar than behind it. The altar itself is freestanding on the top of the stepped platform and extends almost entirely across its width. A large column is placed near each corner of the altar. These serve as supports for a canopy which Petre designed to cover the altar. Fortunately, the single sheet of pencil drawings by Petre showing the architect’s intentions very clearly has survived (fig. 8).³³

In Chapter Five it will be argued that Petre’s intentions for the sanctuary have been seriously misrepresented; the fact that his altar design was never executed has contributed to this. The sheet of drawings (fig. 8) has not always been acknowledged and has

³¹ The detailed description of the building which was published at the time of its opening, for example in the *Press*, Vol. LXII, Issue 12117, 13 February 1905, p.8, distinguishes between the “choir” and the “sanctuary”, regarding the latter as only that raised area on which the altar proper with its own steps, sits. The same description states that the choir is raised five steps above the nave floor level, the sanctuary seven steps above, and a further three steps above that to reach to altar, a total of fifteen steps from nave to altar.

³² The contents of the 1902 Lenten Pastoral were reported in the *New Zealand Tablet*, 13 February 1902, p.3. A month later this quotation from the Pastoral is repeated in an account of the building-in-progress being opened to the public: *The Star*, Issue 7354, 17 March 1902, p.4.

³³ Uncatalogued sheet of drawings, inscribed “Christchurch Catholic Cathedral/Proposed High Altar”. Signed and dated “Frank W. Petre, Architect, October 1st, 1904”. CCDA.

certainly never been examined in detail. Philippe Hamilton alone grasped its significance well enough to realise that Petre's intentions were subsequently misrepresented.³⁴

The dimensions and scale of Petre's altar and canopy

The drawing of the proposed high altar and canopy reveals what Drawing No. 2 does not, namely the surprising height of the canopy columns and its form and scale. The outline of the framing sanctuary arch which springs from the piers is included: this reveals that the base of the canopy's triangular pediment sits just above the entablature of the piers and its apex extends approximately half way up the sanctuary arch. A cross surmounts the pediment, adding to the overall height of the structure. Using the scale noted by Petre this would indicate a height of 22 feet (6.7m) from the base of the canopy's columns to the top of their entablature, and a further 8 feet (2.43m) to the top of the canopy pediment (excluding the cross), a total of 30 feet (9.14m). The altar proper would be almost 8 feet (2.43m) wide: with its steps included this would extend to 12 feet (3.65m).

Petre's harmoniously proportioned structure is composed of three elements of almost equal height. The distance from the base of the altar to its *mensa*; from the *mensa* to the attached reredos with its three gradines; and from the top of the reredos cornice to the top of the exposition throne surmounted by a small cross is in each case approximately 3 feet 6 inches (1m).

Petre's altar canopy

The design of the altar and canopy repeat elements from the cathedral's classical architecture. The recessed panels of the column bases recall those of the pairs of superimposed pilasters on the front face of the sanctuary wall. The canopy columns are fluted, as are the seven large columns behind the altar, but those have Ionic capitals, while the canopy columns have Corinthian capitals. Petre has deliberately distinguished the canopy columns from those of the architecture behind them, and at the same time established a visual link with the order of the columns at gallery level, which are Corinthian. He has by such means successfully integrated the altar into its sanctuary setting.

³⁴ Hamilton, op. cit., Vol. II, p. 340.

The frieze of the canopy's entablature is filled with continually spiralling vegetation³⁵. The pediment appears to have a surround of a similar design, on a smaller scale, and the drawing of the underside of the canopy shows similar panels between the corner column capitals, with the entire rectangular underside is filled with a centralized and stylized floral pattern. Petre envisaged a realistic figural group for the canopy pediment. Had it been executed this would have provided the only figurative work on the altar/canopy ensemble.³⁶

No information has been found concerning the materials to be used for the planned altar canopy. The columns and pediment surrounds would presumably be of Oamaru stone and would match the stone used elsewhere in the sanctuary. The underside of the canopy could have been pressed zinc panels from the firm of Wunderlich's in Sydney which supplied the panels and shallow saucer domes for the cathedral nave ceiling. It is presumed the canopy would have had a similar, though probably undecorated, pediment at the rear of the canopy, although this would have obstructed the view of the altar for anyone in the gallery at the rear of the apse during a major celebration, when the galleries were thronged with people.

The materials to be used for the canopy "roof" are also problematic: while the threat of fire in buildings of wood had long been uppermost in the minds of Grimes and his building committee there was also perhaps the threat of earthquake to be considered. Such a structure must be safe as well as aesthetically and spiritually appropriate. Perhaps additional zinc panels for the pediment surrounds could have lightened the load. It is not known if the pediment figures were planned in glittering mosaic, or whether the scene would be painted.³⁷ Whatever the medium it would have injected some permanent colour into the sanctuary which was otherwise a neutral backdrop dependent on seasonal

³⁵ Probably acanthus leaves: it looks very similar to that on the exterior of the Roman Maison Carrée in Nîmes and the Ara Pacis in Rome, both works from the time of Augustus.

³⁶ Christ stands in *contrapposto* and addresses a kneeling female figure and a kneeling male who appears to hold a chalice. The identity of the kneeling figures is unclear although the veiled female could be presumed to be the Virgin Mary while the male could well be St John the Evangelist. St John the Baptist, however, is the patron of the diocese³⁶, and it is that St John who historically often appears with Mary flanking the crucified Christ in Deesis groupings above the altar, often on a rood screen.

³⁷ Although Petre's large architectural scrapbook is held in CCDA (uncatalogued) it does not help with these speculations. It consists of a wide range of designs for altars, buildings and funerary monuments, some his own work but most from overseas suppliers.

liturgical vestments and floral decorations for relief from the uniform cream of the Oamaru stone. What is not in doubt, however, is the scale of the structure, and the fact that it would obscure to some extent the seven Ionic columns and their entablature in the apse behind the altar.

Petre's Altar

As the structure of the altar canopy is unexpectedly large, so is the altar rather smaller than might be expected given its paramount status and its location in the vast space of the new cathedral (fig. 8).

Its strongest design elements are the many verticals and horizontals which compete for the viewer's attention. The cornices of its three entablatures project very markedly indeed at different levels, drawing the eye out into the side spaces of the sanctuary. The cornices of the *mensa* and that of the reredos are supported by a host of carved corbels which add to the impression of weight and substance. The horizontals of the three *gradini* and the horizontal divisions of frieze and architrave within the entablatures also contribute to the sideways "pull" of the structure. The verticals of the Corinthian columns and pilasters, over the three levels of the structure, attempt to counteract this, not altogether successfully. Perhaps Petre felt that a strong horizontal emphasis was needed to assert the altar's presence; he may have felt it was in danger of being absorbed into the forest of verticals surrounding in the sanctuary.

The Petre altar continues the cathedral's classical architectural vocabulary. Above its three steps the front of the altar *mensa* is supported by six equidistant small, fluted Corinthian columns, with an appropriate entablature above. There is a space between these columns and a rear supporting wall that rises above the *mensa* through three levels of shallow *gradini*.³⁸ Below the *mensa*, a central design of a flat cross against the radiating points of a star, suggesting Christ's triumph over death, is the only religious symbol on the altar proper. The tabernacle is a miniature building with an impressive façade. The spandrels above the arch are also decorated with a floral motif, and on either side of the tabernacle, a framed rectangular panel of acanthus-type scrolled ornament is

³⁸ A possible alternative interpretation could be that these horizontal bands are not gradines of shelves at all, but purely ornamental features. This would be unusual however in a cathedral altar of this style and date.

isolated against a plain ground. An elaborate entablature, completes the reredos. The exposition throne stands on a plain base supported by curved side brackets. Only two of its slender, fluted, Corinthian columns are visible in Petre's finely drawn frontal view.³⁹

The building continues

The building progressed as funds allowed. A special Act of Parliament enabled the Church to borrow the funds necessary for completion. Bishop Grimes, writes Hanrahan, again "dipped his pen in vitriol"⁴⁰ and on October 4 1904 wrote angrily to Petre, claiming that "the building is irremediably ruined", after unexpected subsidence of two of the piers was apparent: he was mollified by a customarily measured and reassuring response from Petre.⁴¹ Although Petre's design for the high altar is dated 1904 there is no extant correspondence or other record concerning this design. By this date the relationship between Grimes and Petre had obviously cooled.

Bishop Grimes at the Second Australasian Catholic Congress, Melbourne, 24-31 October, 1904

The Empowering Bill having become law on 18 October 1904, the date for the official opening and dedication was set for 12 February 1905, with Archbishop Carr again officiating.

Bishop Grimes travelled to Melbourne in late October 1904. O'Meehan states that this trip was "to plan for the Cathedral opening with Archbishop Carr who had laid the foundation stone" and this is repeated by Hanrahan.⁴² While Grimes no doubt did take the opportunity to confirm arrangements for the opening of the Cathedral, he in fact went to Melbourne to attend the Second Australasian Catholic Conference, held at Cathedral Hall from October 24 to October 31.⁴³ Moreover, he delivered one of the many papers given

³⁹ Only two may have been intended but four would be more usual.

⁴⁰ Hanrahan, op. cit., p.52.

⁴¹ Letter from Grimes to Petre, 4 October 1904, CCDA.

⁴² O'Meehan, op. cit., p.236, and Hanrahan, op. cit., p.56.

⁴³ The relationship between Archbishop Carr and Bishop Grimes is a tantalizing *lacuna* in the records of the Melbourne Diocesan Historical Commission. There is no mention of Christchurch at all in the Carr papers consulted. Nor is there, perhaps as a consequence, any mention at all of Bishop Grimes or of Christchurch in T. F. Boland's comprehensive and affectionate biography of Archbishop Carr. CCDA, however, holds a number of letters exchanged between the bishop and the archbishop, and further investigation into their friendship could be possible. Bishop Grimes diary for 1904, held in CCDA, confirms his travel arrangements and movements within Australia in this period.

by clergy and members of the laity at the Congress. The papers, almost seventy in number, were published in the handsome tome issued to all who subscribed, together with reports of the lively discussions which followed.⁴⁴

Significantly, Bishop Grimes' lecture topic was "The Liturgy of the Catholic Church" and was placed in Section VI – "Sacred Art"⁴⁵ Five of the nine papers in Section VI concerned sacred music.⁴⁶ The Liturgy is therefore placed firmly in the cultural frame, along with art, architecture and music, all of which are seen as expressions of man's desire to use his skills in the public worship of God. The altar is an unspoken presence throughout Bishop Grimes' paper, for the Mass, the highest form of Liturgy, cannot be celebrated without it.⁴⁷ Grimes does not single out any aspects of the liturgical celebration; rather, his words create an atmosphere of awe and respect in which perfect observance of the entire liturgy is the only right and indeed natural response. He is here encouraging all those present to show their pride in their beautiful Liturgy by the manner of its celebration.

He laments that few study the "beautiful rites and ceremonies which make up the Church's Liturgy" and even "openly display an utter disregard bordering on contempt, of the rules and observances of the Liturgy".⁴⁸ He then contrasts this disregard of rubrics with that of "Him Who, God that He was, never failed to fulfil every iota of the ceremonial laws, to which He could in no way be bound."⁴⁹ He insists that exterior acts of worship must also be accompanied by "some interior act, otherwise it were a mere matter of form, if not an act of hypocrisy".⁵⁰ Bishop Grimes makes a careful distinction between rites and ceremonies: while a ceremony "signifies any exterior act of religion" a

⁴⁴ Ibid. *passim*. Unfortunately there is no account of any comments made after the delivery of Bishop Grimes' paper, though *The Advocate* of 5 November 1904 reports that it was received with much appreciation.

⁴⁵ *Proceedings of the Second Australasian Catholic Congress held in the Cathedral Hall, Melbourne, October 24th to 31st, 1904*, Melbourne: St. Patrick's Cathedral, 1904.

⁴⁶ This is understandable, given the recent pronouncement on this subject by the Pope in his *Motu Proprio* of 25 April 1904 concerning the priority of plain chant.

⁴⁷ Ibid. p.492. Bishop Grimes here defines Liturgy as "exterior Catholic worship" but it is clear in this paper and in his pastorals, sermons and other writings that he naturally prioritizes the Mass.

⁴⁸ *Proceedings*, op. cit., p.484.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid. p.485.

rite “properly speaking, means a certain collection or series of ceremonies for the public performance of Divine Worship.”⁵¹ Rites celebrated at the altar were his top priority.

Bishop Grimes affirms that he who neglects the exterior “inevitably brings about the ruin of the interior”.⁵² The correct observance of the liturgy is the necessary prerequisite for a flourishing interior life. None of this can take place without the Liturgy, which of course depends upon the presence of an altar. He argues that societies cannot even exist without exterior worship, hence the absolute necessity of the Liturgy, which preserves the faith, helps man to be devoted by its beauty, and unites men everywhere.⁵³ God himself took responsibility for the details of Jewish ceremonial, which strongly confirms the importance of solemn rites.⁵⁴

In conclusion he insists that the Liturgy is not one among many arts, but the inspiration for the best in all the great arts. Poetry, music, sculpture, history, architecture erected in honour of God (with the cathedrals of Melbourne and Sydney as prominent examples⁵⁵), all take the Liturgy as their point of inspiration. Catholics should be proud to belong to a Church with such a beautiful and ancient Liturgy.”⁵⁶

The Liturgy, then, is a serious business, and must be celebrated properly, as observed by Christ himself. It must not be hollow observance, but matched by an interior impulse. It is vital to embodied man and to society’s very existence: it is “Christianity presented to the senses.”⁵⁷ It teaches and unites all believers. Christian should be even more observant than Jews, as they operate under the New Law of Love. They prepare man for future union

⁵¹ Ibid. .

⁵² Ibid. p.486.

⁵³ Ibid. pp.487-489.

⁵⁴ Ibid. p.489.

⁵⁵ St. Patrick’s Cathedral, Melbourne, designed by Thomas Wardell, was opened on 27 October, 1897. Bishop Grimes did not attend as he was in Ireland at the time, according to his diaries held by CCDA. St. Mary’s Cathedral, Sydney, also designed by Wardell, was dedicated and opened on 6 September 1900, having been consecrated on 8 September 1882, although it was then incomplete. Bishop Grimes attended the 1900 opening which was closely followed by the First Australasian Catholic Congress in St. Mary’s Hall, which he also attended. See the report in *The Advocate*, 15 September 1900, p.1.

⁵⁶ Ibid. 493.

⁵⁷ Ibid. 492.

with God in heaven and on earth. Bishop Grimes' language may be typically ornate, but his meaning is crystal clear.

Grimes also served as "President" when the first three papers of the "Sacred Art" section of the Congress were presented. One of the speakers, Mr. W.B. Tappin, F.R.V.I.A, of Melbourne, included a number of points about altars.⁵⁸ He noted that in Europe altars are often placed under marble canopies in the form of a dome, supported by four marble columns: this "greatly adds to the adornment of the church" and "Such a treatment is quite practicable with us."⁵⁹ At this point Bishop Grimes must presumably have thought of Petre's unexecuted design for altar and canopy.

The Cathedral opens – with the pro-cathedral altar

On Sunday February 12, 1905. Archbishop Carr officiated at the opening and the ceremonies were reported in great detail in the religious and secular press.⁶⁰ The *New Zealand Tablet*, for example, in its special issue, refers to the "delicate creamy white" of the

noble fane ... being set off by the rich tints of stained glass, the robes of the Prelates and officiants, and the palms, Japanese maples, and other evergreens which had been introduced with judicious reserve and refined and cultivated taste.⁶¹

Owing to lack of funds there was no new altar: instead, the wooden gothic altar by Kimball and Button, discussed in Chapter One, continued its previous function for the next eleven years in its new location. The expectation was that it was "soon to be replaced by an altar of very handsome design in keeping with the style of the building."⁶² The Kimball/Button altar had been made for the very different pro-cathedral and could well have seemed "lost" in the vast spaces of its new location. The fact that it was not is due to a number of factors.

Figure 6 shows the Kimball/Button altar in its new setting. Its painted decorations would have been hard to distinguish from a distance, but those who had known the altar over

⁵⁸ W.B.Tappin, "Ecclesiastical Art" in *Proceedings*, op. cit., pp.439-446.

⁵⁹ Ibid. 444. Tappin concludes by urging the Church in Australia to provide training for ecclesiastical architects and craftsmen, as he saw at a church school in Ghent.

⁶⁰ *New Zealand Tablet*, Vol. XXXIII, Issue 7, 16 February, 1905, p.9.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² The laying of the foundation stone was widely reported: the *Auckland Star*, Vol. XXXVI, Issue 37, 13 February 1905, p.3 repeats selections of the extended account of the occasion in the *Press*, Vol. LXII, Issue 12117, 13 February 1905, p.8.

many years would be very familiar with its iconography. Although it has no added exposition throne in this photograph, its dark colour increased its bulk and presence in the sanctuary. Two large, kneeling, adoring angels are positioned forward of the altar on the north and south sides of the sanctuary: facing it with bowed heads and clasped hands, they also help to focus attention on the altar. The humble Kimball/Ball altar would become the focal point in the cathedral sanctuary when the whole space was decorated with candles, flowers, and various types of greenery, as the cycle of liturgical seasons and other devotions demanded.

Chapter Three

Commissioning the Altar: 1906-1916

1906-1911: The First Anniversary and Beyond

After the festivities of the opening ceremonies the matter of a new high altar seems to have been quietly put to one side. Grimes was preoccupied with the remaining debt, as well as other cathedral and diocesan matters.¹

The first anniversary of the opening was an occasion of great celebration, and Grimes prevailed on his friend Archbishop Carr of Melbourne to officiate, and to open the bishop's particular pride, the Chapel of Relics, in one a cathedral side chapel.² Shortly after this, in his Lenten Pastoral of 1906, Grimes writes again about the nature of a cathedral.³ He does not however take this opportunity to urge the purchase of a new high altar, merely noting how beautiful the high altar "and its wealth of white flowers" had looked in the sanctuary at the cathedral's opening.⁴

Grimes' next *ad limina* visit to Rome is imminent but he does not suggest this would be a good opportunity to order an altar.⁵ In May 1907 the cathedral sanctuary acquired "the splendid gift of a beautiful and costly carpet" which completed the effective "adornment of the Sanctuary" but again there is no mention of a new altar.⁶

In late 1911, however, just before the silver jubilee year of the diocese, things began to change in the cathedral. Three new lunette stained glass windows were installed over the front entrances, replacing the plain glass windows in place since 1905 and the time was

¹ Hanrahan, op. cit., p.74, gives details of the reduction in the debt over subsequent years. It had reduced to £5,000 by 1914 (but the interest rate went up at the same time!)

² Archbishop Carr was on holiday in the North Island, with the Bishop of Ballarat. He delayed his return to Melbourne to oblige Bishop Grimes. See also *New Zealand Tablet*, Vol. XXXIV, Issue 4, 25 January 1906, p.20, which acknowledges the "considerable inconvenience" involved, and *New Zealand Tablet*, Vol. XXXIV, Issue 7, 15 February 1906, p.3, for a detailed account of the morning and evening ceremonies.

³ Pastoral of the Bishop of Christchurch for the Year of Grace 1906, Christchurch. This was reported in the *New Zealand Tablet*, Vol. XXXIV, Issue 10, 8 March 1906, p.3.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ *New Zealand Tablet*, Vol. XXXV, Issue 21. 23 May 1907, p.14. This was the gift of Mrs. A.J. White, a generous donor to the cathedral and the diocese.

right for an altar commission.⁷ The diocese, and the bishop, would be celebrating their silver jubilees in 1912. Bishop Grimes' correspondence with two English companies throughout the year makes for enlightening reading and shows his close involvement in the process of obtaining an altar. He is both bishop and patron, and nothing can proceed except by his agency. The long and complex process of commissioning the altar forms the main substance of this chapter. Bishop Grimes, for reasons yet unknown, finally decided to give the commission to the Italian sculptor and painter, Giuseppe Cassioli, whose career and oeuvre will be discussed in Chapter Four.

1912: Grimes approaches potential makers

In February 1912, Grimes wrote to "Messrs. Walley, Goody [sic] & Cripps & Co" of London, enclosing a design for an altar for the Cathedral.⁸ This was

merely a suggestion made by our Architect, who leaves it to you as to the details...If you have a more suitable one neither we nor the Architect will mind, on the contrary, we invite you to send it or modify this one as you think fit."⁹

As Hanrahan has noted, this gave the company "great latitude" in interpreting the design and choice of materials.¹⁰ The letter also included the dimensions of the sanctuary, noting that it had "seven fluted columns in white stone" behind the altar.¹¹ The "design" referred to was not Francis Petre's; his association with the cathedral had been severed years earlier.

In a rare example, the bishop expresses his personal aesthetic opinion and offers his own suggestions to the company:

⁷ They expressly continued the Eucharistic theme of the building's dedication, depicting the Last Supper; the ancient symbols of a fish and a basket of bread; and the pelican feeding her young with her own blood.

⁸ Grimes to Mess. Walley, Goody [sic] & Cripps & Co. 7 February, 1912. Altar File, CCDA. The company's letterhead in subsequent correspondence shows the name of the firm was Walton, Goody & Cripps, Ltd. of Eagle Wharf Road. London. They were described on the letterhead as "Quarry Owners, Merchants and Workers in Marble and Granite", with depots and works in Liverpool, Bristol, and Plymouth. The company also had quarries and works in Carrara, Italy, and they were agents for Verde Antico marble.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Hanrahan, *op. cit.* p.70.

¹¹ Ibid.

I had thought a Throne over the Tabernacle in a Dome like shape would have been appropriate with Columns in coloured marbles. I thought too that Alabaster might prevail, with coloured marbles because of the back-ground of white Oamaru stone.¹²

Grimes does not shy away from colour and has obviously imagined the visual impact of coloured marbles against the creamy stone background of the sanctuary.

He asks that a suitable design or designs be sent at once as 1912 is “the Jubilee year of my appointment as the first Bishop” and concludes by noting that he “hopes shortly to see the Altar you are sending to the Timaru Church – Timaru is in my Diocese.”¹³ This letter shows the bishop’s flexibility concerning design and materials. It also gives a glimpse of the bishop’s own aesthetic sense. While Grimes’ sermons are packed with visual images to support his explanation of biblical texts, or to reinforce a theological point, it is rare to find such a personal response to a particular artistic need. There is a sense of urgency in his letter; 1912 clearly marks a turning point in the saga of the long-desired high altar. It is also very evident that he wishes to be personally involved in decisions concerning the form the altar would take. He has obviously seen the arrival of many new altars over the years; the Timaru example is but the latest.

The “design” sent to the company is presumed to be that of the Christchurch firm of architects, S. and A. Luttrell. This will be discussed in detail later in this chapter. In April they wrote to Grimes, enclosing an altar design for forwarding to a different company, recorded as Messrs. Hardman Bros. “for estimate for building same” and suggesting that alternate prices for different materials be requested.¹⁴ The architects’ letter repeats their instruction to Grimes to let the company know that “they may vary the detail of the design if they think that it could be improved upon, and assure them that we would not

¹² Grimes to Messrs. Walley, Goody [sic] & Cripps & Co. 7 February, 1912. Altar File, CCDA.

¹³ *Star*, Issue 10498, 27 June 1912, p.4. Sacred Heart, Timaru, was the last of Petre’s basilicas. The altar was finally installed in 1912. There is no evidence that Petre completed a design for an altar for that church. Its original high altar is still in place. Nor is it known if Grimes was involved in any way in the choice of the altar.

¹⁴ S. & A. Luttrell to Grimes, April 23, 1912. Altar File, CCDA. Subsequent correspondence was with the company Hardman Powell & Co. (Gerald Hardman), “Craftsmen in Iron, Bronze, Brass, Aluminium, Silver and gold, medallers, enamellers, gilders etc.” In their letter of 30 May 1912 they note that theirs was the department to deal with the earlier enquiry which had been forwarded to them by John Hardman & Co.

mind.”¹⁵ It seems that Bishop Grimes, however, wanted some comparative figures, and, sent the architects’ drawing to Walton, Gooddy & Cripps.

The company received two photographs of the sanctuary and a pastorals from Bishop Grimes: these were deemed “useful to us in preparing our drawings”.¹⁶ They then submitted tenders, sketches with two different elevations and two plans for his consideration. The first would cost around £1,300 including freight (estimated for thirteen tons) and insurance, though the cost could be reduced if alabaster were substituted for Morocco Onyx, and glass mosaic panels were omitted. This design was based on the Luttrells’ design. The second design, by their own artist, was recommended, and this one would fourteen tons. Cost could be reduced as suggested for the first design.¹⁷ The cost of steps was not included.¹⁸ Changes to the designs could be made, and in fact they suggest that a Last Supper panel replace that of the cross, at no extra cost.¹⁹ Both designs included an elaborate reredos as well as the altar proper.

This was obviously intended to be a major work, with its relief and glass mosaic panels, multi-coloured marbles and “statues”.²⁰ Both variations feature a panelled altar frontal, two *gradini* on a panelled reredos, and a tabernacle surrounded by coloured marble columns surmounted by a canopy which is also supported by marbles.

Having received no reply to their letter of 24 May, Walton, Gooddy & Cripps, Ltd. wrote again on 14 June.²¹ This follow-up letter gives the dimensions of the suggested structure, as follows:

¹⁵ Ibid. See also Ann McEwan’s M.A. thesis “From cottages to ‘skyscrapers’” the architecture of A.E. & E.S. Luttrell in Tasmania and New Zealand”, University of Canterbury, 1988. McEwan clearly shows the close links the architects had with the Christchurch Diocese, particularly after Petre’s “fall from grace with the bishop”, and the strong support they received from the Very Rev. Father Price, when Chancellor of the diocese. Ibid. pp.140-141. With the exception of St. Mary’s, Hokitika (1914), all their work for the diocese was in the Gothic style. Ibid. p.142.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid. The cost of steps would be £37.10.0 or £51.0.0 depending on the marble selected.

¹⁹ Ibid. Seventeen samples of marbles intended for use accompanied the letter and plans. Their whereabouts is unknown, as is that of the plans and elevation of the two designs.

²⁰ Ibid. No more information is provided about the “statues”.

²¹ Ibid. Their letter of 24 May 1912 does not survive.

Height: 6.2m to top of Cross; Length: 3.3m; Width: 2.6m not including niche to be built into wall and lined with slabs.²²

On May 30th 1912 Hardman Powell & Co. wrote to Grimes, promising sketches and prices.²³ Meanwhile, in June 1912, the episcopal jubilee celebrations were underway. These included the presentation of an address to the bishop in which his cathedral was referred to as “the magnificent Cathedral, the architectural gem of Australasia.”²⁴

On 26 July 1912 Hardman Powell & Co. wrote a covering letter for a “finished coloured drawing of the High Altar”²⁵ together with a range of prices, according to materials. Four variations of altar and reredos are offered, all to the same basic design. The prices range from £850 to £1780.²⁶ The gross weight of the packed work, ready for shipping, is surprisingly estimated at 30 tons, more than double the weight estimated by Walton, Gooddy & Cripps, Ltd. for their altar/s.²⁷

Approaching the Luttrells’ design

The imposing altar and reredos in the sensitive sketch by the Luttrells (figs. 10-12) is a large rectangular structure surmounted by an arched canopy. Its scale and complexity are evident in the plan and elevation by the architects. The altar proper is set on three steps, the lowest of which extends for over 18 feet (5.48m), the same width at the base of the reredos. The *mensa* is supported at its front edge by four short columns with Ionic capitals, standing on high bases, and surmounted by an undecorated entablature.²⁸ A

²² Ibid. The reference to installing the altar back “against the wall” is rather confusing, given the layout of the cathedral sanctuary with its seven freestanding columns. Presumably the “wall” of the reredos is intended here. It is not known why the measurements are given in metres rather than feet.

²³ Hardman Powell & Co. to Grimes, 30 May 1912. Altar File. CCDA. His letter to them had been delayed: it was addressed to Messrs, John Hardman & Co, Stained Glass Artists. They also promise to send a sketch and price for a small altar for the new Sumner church.

²⁴ Ibid. The address concludes with the hope that the cathedral “may soon receive the crown of episcopal consecration”; in other words, that it may soon be free of debt.

²⁵ Hardman Powell & Co., Birmingham, to Grimes, 26 July 1912. This letter includes an added handwritten comment that the architects’ original drawing has also been returned. The coloured drawing is not held in CCDA unlike the Luttrell’s returned sketch, which has had the date of its return added by Hardman Powell & Co.

²⁶ Ibid. For an additional £28 a brass crucifix could also be ordered, and candlesticks at 30 shillings each could also be included in the order, again using code words supplied.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ It is not clear from the drawing whether the sculpted panels are flush with the front of the altar table, or whether the columns are free standing and all the panels are part of the reredos.

sculpted marble relief of the Last Supper is centrally placed.²⁹ Panels of the four Evangelists are framed by the remaining columns.³⁰

The round tabernacle, seen in Figures 7, 8a and 8b, is set well back from the *mensa* on top of its own set of three curved miniature steps. It is guarded by two slender columns with composite capitals supporting an entablature of architrave, very deep plain frieze and a cornice with dentils. On the flat top of the tabernacle stands a crucifix; presumably this is where the monstrance would be placed for Exposition, as there is no indication of a higher throne.

The drawing also includes a simple line which extends across the top of the canopy arch until it meets two verticals which rise from the outer edges of the supporting piers. The architect's intention is not clear here; some sort of solid structure is indicated. A further crucifix, centrally positioned, is lightly sketched on the horizontal line, to complete the structure. The high altar is not mentioned again by them until September, when Hardman hopes the bishop liked their design for the "large altar for your cathedral", and assuring him that they could modify the design if the quoted costs were prohibitive.³¹ They next sent five samples of marble and three of other stones.³² The final paragraph of the letter is confusing, as if refers to Grimes' wish that the 'Last Supper' be the only statuary on the front of the altar, as if an order had actually been placed, and compounds this impression by proceeding to suggest various substitutions. Letters from Hardman Powell & Co. to Grimes in November and December do not mention the high altar.³³ The year ends with no evidence that an order was placed with Hardman Powell & Co. with whom no subsequent correspondence is recorded. The lengthy and time-consuming process had not resulted in the commission after all!

²⁹ It is not the commonly depicted composition by Leonardo.

³⁰ In their letter of 26 July 1912 Hardman Powell & Co. note that the only change that they would make to the architect's "most excellent" design is to suggest that the throne and tabernacle be made smaller.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Hardman Powell & Co. to Grimes, November 7 1912.

³³ There are four letters from Hardman Powell & Co. during this time. On November 11 a personal letter from Gerald Hardman asked for Grimes' support in their approach to J.S. Swan, the architect of the cathedral proposed for Wellington. Letters written on December 5, December 9, and December 19 concern the order for the altars for Sumner and Hawkes Bay, which were expected to be despatched at last on January 7, 1913.

1913–1914: Approaching Cassioli : Bishop Grimes and Giuseppe Cassioli

In the documentation and chronology of the cathedral's high altar 1913 is a major *lacuna*. Bishop Grimes had left Christchurch for Europe on 20 February, and hoped to be back by Christmas.³⁴ He is known to have visited Florence where the painter and sculptor Giuseppe Cassioli had his studio, and as will be seen from subsequent correspondence, at some point he had direct contact with the artist.³⁵ In any event it was Cassioli who obtained the elusive commission for the high altar. It is not known when, where or by whom Cassioli was recommended to Grimes. Grimes intended to stay with friends in Florence, but whether they suggested Cassioli or the recommendation came earlier from church contacts remains unknown.³⁶ Cassioli's recent work may well have been brought to the bishop's attention. The artist's oeuvre and its significance will be discussed in detail in Chapter 4.

Dated 14 March 1914 at Florence, a document written in French and signed by Prof. Giuseppe Cassioli (*artiste sculpteur*) and Averardo Tesetti (*maître d'art*) confirms the details of the altar to be made for Christchurch, according to the design of "M. M. & A. Luttrell architects"(sic) and the dimensions and materials recorded in the document.³⁷

It specifies that the three altar steps and bases will be of a type of Carrara marble known as *Blanc de Ravaccione* and this will also be used for the panelling of the reredos. All the other parts of the altar will be made of first class Carrara marble.³⁸ The whole structure in fact is to be made of the richest materials, and precise descriptions of all the different marbles to be used are given. The combination of natural coloured stones, gilt bronze, relief panels and decorative details make for a complex and visually dazzling construction for the clergy and servers in the sanctuary and the congregation in the nave. The large scale of the altar would magnify the impact of all its elements and their

³⁴ *Star*, 20 February 1913, p.1. He planned to attend a Eucharistic Congress in Malta; make a brief visit to Rome, followed by visits in England, Scotland and Ireland; make a longer visit to Rome; and travel in France and Belgium. In the event he was too ill to attend the Congress: see *Press*, Vol.XLIX, Issue 14747, 18 August 1913, p.2.

³⁵ *The Press*, Vol. XLIX, Issue 14847, 12 December 2013, p.4.

³⁶ The Cassioli Museum in Siena was contacted in 2014 but they have no information about the altar. Unfortunately Grimes' diaries for 1913, 1914 and 1915 are not found with his other diaries in CCDA. See also *Star*, 29 October 1913, p.7.

³⁷ Signed agreement from Cassioli and Tosetti to Grimes, 4 March 1914. The document does not in fact include dimensions.

³⁸ *Ibid*.

combined effect. The documentation would no doubt have created a strong sense of excited anticipation at diocesan level.

Cassioli is meticulous in his detailed descriptions:

The steps will be inlaid with the most beautiful *Brocatelle jaune de Sienne* and *Diaspre* (Jasper) antique. There will be two panels on the arch of the canopy in *marbre vert antique de Grèce*. The large columns of the reredos will all be in the most beautiful *rouge de Verone*, and the two smaller columns (colonettes) of the canopy will be in *marbre Cipollino antique*. The four small columns of the tabernacle will be made in *Agate orientale ancienne* and the four columns of the throne will be in the most beautiful marble it is possible to find.³⁹

The bronzes will all be chased and gilded, as will the cross, capitals, and bases etc. The door of the tabernacle with the “Cène d’Emmaus” in gilded bronze will be totally the work of Prof. Cassioli as will be the angels holding up the throne (bronze) and the adoring angels of the two panels of the reredos (marble). The central panel of the altar will have a bas relief of two angels adoring a chalice (gilt bronze), and two circular panels of figures of angels in bas relief (bronze). The panel at the top will show the Most Holy Spirit in bas relief (marble).⁴⁰ The background of all the sculptures, and that of the semi-dome of the canopy, will be gilded in true 18 K. gold. The other panels of the bases of the reredos will be in rich coloured marbles in colours like the other marbles mentioned.⁴¹

All will be made and assembled in Florence, specially marked and numbered to facilitate its reassembly in New Zealand; a special plan will give all the necessary instructions.⁴²

The packaging will be very solid and the work will be insured against breakages and all the risks of transport.⁴³ Cassioli is thoroughly involved with every aspect of the work’s production and despatch.

The price is 30,000 Italian lire, to be paid in specified instalments: a deposit confirming the agreement; when the work is half completed; when the work is ready to leave Florence; when it arrives in Christchurch.⁴⁴ Grimes is to pay the transportation costs and

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid. Several letters to Grimes from Fr. G. Régis, of Lyon, are also included in the Altar file. That of 25 July 1914 confirms he has arranged to send 2.500 lire “*au sculpteur de Florence*” via an intermediary.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid. “*Le travail sera assure contre roptures et tuts les risques de transport.*” Just whose responsibility it is to take out this insurance will be a painful question when the altar finally arrives in New Zealand.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

all parts of the altar will be completed and ready to leave Florence within twelve months of receipt of the bishop's acceptance of these specifications.⁴⁵

Between February and August 1914 four letters to Grimes were written by Fr. G. Régis S.M. at Marist headquarters in Lyons.⁴⁶ He had been handling Grimes' financial affairs in Europe, including a payment to Cassioli.⁴⁷ While O'Meehan assumes the letter of August 18th, written after the outbreak of World War One, informs Grimes that his altar is delayed because the quarry concerned has been caught up in hostilities, Régis is not here referring to the altar for Christchurch.⁴⁸ On August 29 he advises Grimes that there is no need to send any advances as "*les autels*" cannot be made yet because of the war.⁴⁹ He will advise him how to make payment when possible, and 10,000 lire is being sent for the work going on in Florence.⁵⁰

On August 20 1914, a little over a fortnight after the outbreak of World War I, Pope Pius X died.⁵¹ The next day Bishop Grimes received a letter from the late Pope, through Cardinal Merry Del Val, Secretary of State, "forwarding a contribution towards the erection of a 'permanent high altar for the Cathedral'."⁵² Grimes had presumably mentioned the need for an altar during his audiences in 1913; he may also have subsequently written to the Pope. A donation from the Pope confirms the importance of having a suitable altar for the cathedral.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Fr. G. Régis S.M. to Grimes, 25 July 1914, 17 August 1914, 29 August 1914. Régis's letters are handwritten and all just headed Lyons, apart from the latest one, of 17 July 1915, which has a printed heading "Procure des Missions d'Océanie Rue de l'Annonciade, 13, Lyon".

⁴⁷ Régis to Grimes, 25 July 1914.

⁴⁸ O'Meehan, op. cit., 237. Régis to Grimes, 17 August 1914. Régis does write of the quarry being affected by the War but in the context of an altar commissioned by "*les bonnes Soeurs*" which will now not reach them by December.

⁴⁹ Régis to Grimes, 29 August 1914. Altar File. CCDA. It is not clear which altars are referred to here.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ *Star*, Issue 11162, 21 August 1914, p.5. A Solemn Pontifical High Mass was celebrated a week later by Bishop Grimes in the cathedral.

⁵² Ibid.

Death of Bishop Grimes

This study of the documents must be interrupted at this point to acknowledge the death of Bishop Grimes himself. He died on March 15 1915, without having the pleasure of seeing the completed altar in his cathedral where he is buried in a side chapel.⁵³

On July 15 1915, Fr. Régis wrote most of the altar left on July 12, in 89 cases.⁵⁴ Full assembly instructions were included. Freight and insurance against war damage need to be arranged, though the sculptors have taken out the usual insurance, and he himself will see to the shipping.⁵⁵ Confirmation that 88 cases had left on the s/s *Australian* was sent to Grimes on 9 October 1915 together with details of the total costs of shipping 16,200 kilos, amounting to £182.19.6.⁵⁶

Details of the contents of 89 cases were provided by Cassioli as promised and a supplementary list of an additional 40 cases and their contents is also extant.⁵⁷ His assembly instructions are based on the division of the cases into twelve logical groupings. Figures 15 - 22 show photographs supplied by Cassioli to assist in this. There is a typed sheet for each group, and a photograph or diagram attached to show how it should be assembled.⁵⁸ Cassioli advises that since Bishop Grimes' death he has continued to work on the altar with love in honour of his memory. His fees however will scarcely cover his considerable expenses – the war for liberty currently being fought has affected “*notre classe artistique*” more than any other – marble costs have doubled, transport is more difficult, raised taxes etc. have forced them to unexpected sacrifices in order to keep their word and finish the work in a year. Grimes had instructed him, both in person and in his

⁵³ He died in Sydney after an operation in the Lewisham hospital in the care of the nuns of the Little Company of Mary. See the *Press*, March 25, 1915, and the *Canterbury Times*, 31 March. 1915.

⁵⁴ Régis to “*mon chér père*”, 17 July 1915. Altar File. CCDA. No identifying name is given.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Arcangeli Gattis & Martelli to Father Hill, Christchurch, 9 October, 1915. This is dated 20 months after Cassioli's statement setting out exactly what would be provided and promising completion within twelve months of confirmation that Grimes had accepted the statement. This confirmation presumably took some weeks to reach Cassioli, so a delay of perhaps seven to eight months beyond the promised twelve months in wartime is not excessive. Altar File. CCDA.

⁵⁷ *Note Détaillée des 89 Caisses: P.C. 1.89 et leurs contenus.*, (4 pages) and *Contenuto* covering cases 90 – 129 (2 pages). Altar File. CCDA.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

letters to expedite the work for the cathedral.⁵⁹ This he has done and would be happy and honoured to continue to follow their orders.⁶⁰

Cassioli's construction notes and photographs do indeed provide a wonderfully clear guide for the assembly of the altar,⁶¹ and contain much information not found elsewhere. He advises filling the space between the marbles with terra cotta bricks and good cement, "*pour la solidité de la construction*" and at the outset placing an armature of four iron columns and connecting beams behind the altar, in the heart of the reredos, to provide a stable frame.⁶² The measurements of the beams are to be left to the discretion of "*Monsieur l'Ingénieur*" but Cassioli thinks they are necessary for the altar's solidity and "*pour prevenir les consequences des tremblements de terre ou autres causes*": if the armature is fixed solidly to the foundations there will be nothing to fear.⁶³

Cassioli insists it will be easy to assemble the altar using his system. Open the cases in order and follow instructions, using the plans and photographs. When assembling particularly complex parts of the altar, numbers marked on them in crayon will also help: finally, he advises which cement will not stain the marble: grey or white, but not yellow.⁶⁴

On November 27 Arcangeli Gattis & Martelli, the Florentine shipping agents, advised that the remaining cases (90/126, 128/29) had been shipped with details of charges to be paid before the cases can be collected.⁶⁵ A Christchurch firm of monumental masons, Mansfield Sons, records a charge of £118 for "marble steps as per contract, without steps

⁵⁹ Ibid. "*(de vive voce e dans les lettres)*"

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ *Construction de l'Autel*, 14 typed pages and 11 attached photographs. The page "*IV Groupe de Caisses*" is missing. The instructions are very full. Cassioli even notes that he is using metrics "*pour éviter de me tromper dans les calculs*". Altar file, CCDA.

⁶² Ibid. p.2.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid. p.3

⁶⁵ Arcangeli Gattis & Martelli to Fr. F. Hills, 27 November 1915, Altar File. CCDA. The amount to be paid is £84.11.6.

for the altar”,⁶⁶ At the same time a mosaic pavement supplied from Melocco Brothers in Sydney was to be installed in the sanctuary.⁶⁷

On February 23 the Cathedral Administrator wrote to Cassioli enclosing a final payment, less the estimated cost of breakages which Cassioli must collect from the insurer in due course.⁶⁸ In an undated summary of payments for the altar and mosaic, totalling £2,928.16.2, Bishop Grimes is recorded as having himself paid £911.7.6 into this account.⁶⁹ It also records £192.14.7 as payment by the executors to “Luttrell”.⁷⁰

Cassioli was able to reassure Fr. Hills on 24 February 1916 that the “bronze works of the tabernacle” and other pieces had been sent.⁷¹ He is confident that all arrived safely, such care had he taken with the packing and the work itself, as much as if it were for “one of the most monumental churches in Florence”.⁷² The “terrible war” however meant that his fee was completely absorbed by the cost of materials and labour “and nothing was left for my personal artistic work”.⁷³

He did not expect to have to pay the insurance. It is clear that there has been a misunderstanding with Grimes here that recalls the bishop’s earlier problem with Petre over the cost of the zinc for the cathedral.⁷⁴ Cassioli politely asks for more than the fixed sum to be sent, and to include something as a “gift, or compensation; so that the others

⁶⁶ Mansfield Sons to Fr. T.W. Price, Invoice settled at £250, including a long list of disparate smaller “Extras”, including a new hinge for the font (2 guineas), and four hours’ labour for “cutting groove in slab” (10 shillings) and many panels of marble, with sizes indicated. CCDA.

⁶⁷ Executors of the late Bishop Grimes, Dr. to the Cathedral Fund, January 25, 1916, includes progress payments, duty and charges outstanding for the pavement, totalling £172.20. The total cost of the pavement is recorded as £880.16.10 on a handwritten page of calculations in the Altar file, with all costs from 1915 and 1916 for both altar and pavement. The total cost for the altar is recorded as £1202.4.2. CCDA.

⁶⁸ Letter from Fr. Hills to Cassioli, February 23, 1915. The breakages referred to account for some of the pieces of marble itemized in the Mansfield Sons account. CCDA.

⁶⁹ Hills: High Altar & Mosaic account summary. Altar File. CCDA.

⁷⁰ Ibid. In an account from S. & A. Luttrell, Architects to Fr. Price, dated March 1916, the costs involved in this amount are listed. More than half the amount is for wages and a number of other firms are mentioned, with Blackburn, Smith & Co receiving the largest amount (£47.9.2). CCDA.

⁷¹ Letter from Cassioli to Hills, 24 February 1916. The case also contained: 1 door with “House in Emmaus”; 8 Heads of Pillars; 8 Bases; 1 Cartel for the Cyborium (sic); 4 bases, and 4 reads of pillars; 1 Friere for the throne and other little bronzes.” Altar File. CCDA.

⁷² Letter from Cassioli to Hills, 24 February, 1916, p.1. Altar File. CCDA.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Hanrahan, p.46.

who have been paid, can expose no right on it.”⁷⁵ In a handwritten postscript Cassioli expresses his belief that His Lordship would want him to be recompensed for all his work, and for good measure notes that he retains all the bishop’s letters and cables.⁷⁶

An invoice from J.B. Mansfield & Sons (Monumental Masons) of 3 March 1916 supplies the information that the altar had been unpacked by five of staff on December 18, 1915.⁷⁷ By late February 2016 *The Press* could report that the new altar was “all but finished”.⁷⁸ Bishop Grimes himself is described as “practically the donor of the splendid gift to the Cathedral . . . his bequests completing the payment.”⁷⁹ The difficulties caused by wartime conditions, included “getting the various shipments through the gauntlet of military, rail and sea requirements, and the perils of submarines”.⁸⁰ War was not the only problem; the construction of the large altar took local masons over a month. It was set in concrete for stability and this was faced with Oamaru stone to which the “great slabs of marble (some required six men to handle)” were attached.⁸¹ Note that there is no mention of the support structure support recommended by Cassioli.⁸² Laying the mosaic pavement had also proved problematic for the floor itself was found to be uneven.⁸³ Eventually all was in order for the consecration of Bishop Grimes’ successor, Bishop Matthew Brodie, on 27 February 1916 “with cement still drying on the new high altar and mosaic sanctuary floor”.⁸⁴

The final appearance and the impact of the completed altar will be addressed in the following chapter as part of an assessment of the altar in the context of the career and oeuvre of its creator, Giuseppe Cassioli.

⁷⁵ Ibid. p.2.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ J.B. Mansfield & Sons, invoice to Fr. Price, 3 March 1916. The cost of the men’s labour amounted to only £4.10 of the total of £26.16, which covered fixing steps of the altar, and associated shingle, cement and Oamaru stone.

⁷⁸ *Press*, Vol. LII, Issue 15523, 25 February 1916, p.4.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² It is not known whether these were used.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ O’Meeghan, op. cit., p.252. In *The Press*, 25 January 1916, 8, the Very Rev. Dean Hills is named as Administrator while Price has now become the Very Rev. Chancellor Price.

Chapter Four

Appreciating Cassioli's oeuvre; his use of sources in specific contexts.

Who was Cassioli? The young Cassioli and the art world

Giuseppe Cassioli (1865-1942) was born on 12 October 1865 in Florence, the son of Amos Cassioli (1832-1891), a versatile sienese painter with an established reputation and a wide circle of artist friends.¹ He was trained as a painter by his father, yet from the outset was also particularly committed to sculpture, in which he received instruction from the prominent Sienese sculptor Tito Serocchi (1824-1900).²

As a member of his father's wide artistic circle he was both aware of contemporary changes in the art world, yet at the same time he had a real appreciation of his country's artistic heritage. It was being promoted, and in some cases rediscovered, as part of Italy's fervent nationalism in the wake of the country's reunification. In this nationalistic milieu the teenaged Giuseppe Cassioli first exhibited his works. It was an environment which fostered artistic programmes often supported by public subscription.³

The young Cassioli proved to be an even more versatile artist than his father, and was soon achieving success in his own right, as a brief overview of his oeuvre demonstrates.⁴

¹ These included Ingres (1780-1867). Amos Cassioli was also acquainted with Degas (1834-1917) and Moreau (1826-1898). Amos was widely known for the psychological intensity of his many portraits and was widely acclaimed for the *verosimiglianza* of his works. For an overview of Cassioli's career see Riccardo Carapelli, "Pittori Toscani dell'Ottocento. Giuseppe Cassioli nella Basilica di San Luca a Bologna", *Il Carrobbio*, Vol. XXXVII, 2011, pp.139-146, and "Giuseppe Cassioli pittore e scultore", *Notarizio della Società della Belle Arti – Circolo degli Artisti : Casa di Dante*, no. 18, 2015 (n.p.).

² See Sandra Berresford, *Italian Memorial Sculpture 1820-1940*, London: Frances Lincoln Ltd., 2004, p.53.

³ Carapelli, "Giuseppe Cassioli pittore e scultore", op. cit. Carapelli gives examples of paintings in which Amos used his son as model, and also notes his portraits of Giuseppe Cassioli as a child and as a youth. Concerning Italy's public art programmes and rise of nationalism see also Kathleen Weil-Garris Brandt, "The Choice of Sculpture" in Margaret Haines (ed.), *Santa Maria Del Fiore: The Cathedral and Its Sculpture: Acts of the International Symposium for the VII Centenary of the Cathedral of Florence, Florence, Villa I Tasso, 5-6 June, 1997*, Florence: Cadmo, 2001, p. 17.

⁴ It is neither possible nor appropriate to list all Cassioli's works here. A volume by Riccardo Carapelli, of Florence, is, however, soon to be published. Professor Carapelli also continues to find evidence of previously unknown works. I am very grateful to him for his willingness to enter into correspondence on these matters during research for this thesis, and for advising me of the progress of his own researches.

Cassioli establishes his reputation

He exhibited paintings and sculptures in Florence and Siena in 1884 and 1885 and also worked with his father on a fresco programme in the famous hall of the Palazzo Comunale in Siena in 1885.⁵ In the same year his painting of a naked woman in an abandoned pose, rather unnervingly titled *St. Teresa in Ecstasy*, was accepted for exhibition at the Paris Salon.⁶

In 1887 the young sculptor was awarded second place in a national competition for a monument to Donatello in Florence.⁷ The following year he won, equally with Augustino Passaglia, the prestigious competition to design the doors for the new façade of the Duomo, Sta. Maria del Fiore, in Florence.⁸ Cassioli was awarded the north door, and its execution for its prestigious location was to consume him for the following ten years.⁹ By the end of the century funding for public monuments was less forthcoming, and two projects in which Cassioli was involved were abandoned.¹⁰

Around the end of the century he was one of the artists involved in the decoration of the vast hall in the new Stock Exchange in Odessa and involvement in a wide range of commissions outside Italy was to become a feature of his career.¹¹

⁵ At the *Primotrice de Firenze* in 1884 he exhibited paintings of a half figure and a study of a head as well as a portrait: he showed a realistic bas relief shown in Siena. In 1885 in Siena he exhibited a painting based on Victor Hugo's work, *Toilers of the Sea*, a plaster sculpture of a mother, and a bas-relief. In 1885 he was also awarded a prestigious apprenticeship-cum-scholarship, the *l'Annunato Biringucci a Siena*. The Sienese frescos were battle paintings depicting the Risorgimento. See Carapelli, "Giuseppe Cassioli pittore e scultore", op. cit..

⁶ No. 480 in the Paris Salon exhibition of 1885. While *St. Teresa*, the great Spanish mystic, had previously been shown in ecstasy, most famously by Bernini in his marble sculptural ensemble of 1647-1652 in Sta. Vittoria, Rome, no precedent for a naked St Teresa has been located and it still seems rather daring. See Leopoldo de Luis, "Teresa de Jesús entre Giuseppe Cassioli y George Bataille", in *Las 2001 Noches. Revista de Poesia, Aforismos, Frescores*. No. 120, 2011, for a psychoanalytical discussion of the work that places it in the tradition of mystical literature. In this context it is not seen as shocking, but rather as an appropriate depiction of that 'living flame of love' described by St. Teresa's contemporary, St. John of the Cross.

⁷ See Carapelli, "Giuseppe Cassioli pittore e scultore", op.cit.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ It was opened on June 24, 1899. Cassioli included a roundel with his self-portrait being strangled by a snake in an unobvious reference to the many problems experienced during this work.

¹⁰ In 1899 he received the prestigious commission for a statue of Francesco Talenti for the loggia of the Mercato Nuovo. He was also one of four sculptors chosen to make a model for a proposed tomb for Ugo Foscolo in S. Croce. See Carapelli, "Giuseppe Cassioli pittore e scultore", op. cit.

¹¹ Ibid. He was responsible for depictions of Agriculture, Trade, and Industry in painted panels over the doors.

20th century commissions: diversity of media and styles

In 1900 he received the commission for the tomb of the beloved composer Gioachino Rossini (1792-1868), to be placed prominently in Santa Croce in Florence, by this date the Pantheon of Italy.¹² Other important commissions followed this work, including the altar for Christchurch. Cassioli was also one of three sculptors responsible between 1901 and 1904 for statues and carvings on the new façade of the Duomo at Arezzo, another high-profile sculptural work.¹³

The first decade of the new century also found him producing a stream of designs for medals, postcards with patriotic themes, and bronze decorations such as the plaque produced in 1910 for the centenary of the Republic of Argentina, perhaps indicating that major public or ecclesiastical commissions were becoming less available as the decade progressed.¹⁴

In 1913, after almost a decade without a significant sculptural commission, Cassioli was personally engaged by Bishop Grimes of Christchurch, then visiting Florence, to execute a large marble high altar for his Cathedral of the Blessed Sacrament. This significant commission drew on Cassioli's range of skills and broad knowledge and understanding of architecture and sculpture. After what could be seen as a rather fallow period more than half-way through the artist's career, it was the Christchurch commission that provided the artistic stimulus of another his large-scale sculptural work.

After the end of World War I he spent over a decade painting the vast dome of the Santuario della Madonna di San Luca in Bologna. He attempted to match the style of his predecessor, Bigari, of over one hundred and fifty years earlier, an eighteenth century

¹² The tomb was completed on 23 June 1902. He also exhibited in the Esposizione Concorso V. Alinari, Firenze, in 1902.

¹³ His works at Arezzo were the low relief on the side portal, and four or five statues which decorate the central portal. See Carapelli, "Giuseppe Cassioli pittore e scultore", op. cit. He was also at this time responsible for executing a "table" or plaque with a gold background showing the Holy Family for the Chiesa della Sacra Famiglia in Florence.

¹⁴ Between 1907 and 1911 he participated in the annual exhibitions of the Association of Italian Artists (*Associazione degli artisti italiani*) in Florence.

style of which he was apparently very fond, again demonstrating his versatility and carefully site-specific selection of style.¹⁵

His expertise in very different idioms, including the Byzantine-influenced Beuronese style, was also apparent in other works of this period in Bologna.¹⁶ Several appropriately neo-Gothic works were produced for the early 20th century Chiese dei Sette Santi Fondatori in Florence.¹⁷ In the same year he completed paintings in the Pre-Raphaelite style in another Florentine church, that of S. Ambrosio, confirming his competence and stylistic flexibility according to the requirements of each architectural context.¹⁸

In 1928 his highly successful and long-lasting design for an Olympic Medal was produced.¹⁹ In the same year he executed eighteen large paintings (recently restored) for the Basilica of Our Lady Help of Christians in Lima, Peru.²⁰ In 1933 a commission for the Servite Congregation involved the decoration in neo-Gothic style of the Chapel of the Seven Founders in the hillside Santuario di Montesenario, a popular pilgrimage destination.²¹ From Bologna in the 1930s comes Cassioli's work for a community of enclosed nuns, the Servant Adorers of the Blessed Sacrament (*Ancelle Adoratrice del SS. Sacramento*) in their convent chapel.²² This comprised a large marble high altar showing

¹⁵ See R. Roli, "Painting and Sculpture in the Sanctuary", in M. Fanti and G. Roversi, *The Madonna of San Luca in Bologna*, Bologna, 1993, pp.219-231. The dome is an elaborate plea for peace to Our Lady Queen of Peace who is depicted above many prelates and Pope Benedict XV.

¹⁶ The Beuronese style used muted colourings and had a strong focus on proportion in its depiction of religious subjects.

¹⁷ Church of the Seven Holy Founders: this is a church of the influential Servite order, with which Cassioli had many dealings. This church was very badly damaged by bombing in 1944.

¹⁸ Chiesa di S. Ambrosio.

¹⁹ He had won the competition for this in 1923. It showed a seated figure of Victory, holding a palm in one hand and the victor's crown in the other, with part of the Colosseum in the background. This design remained basically unchanged for over forty years. See Panagiota Papanikolaou, "Illustrating the Olympic Games: the Athens Case (1896, 2004) from Nikolaos Gyzis to Dimitris Papaioannou" in *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, Vol. 4, No.6, April 2014, p.171.

²⁰ See <http://salesianos.pe/noticias/obra-de-arte-exposicion-de-lienzos-restaurados-del-pintor-giuseppe-casioli-en-la-basilica-de-maria-auxiliadora>, for an account of the restoration of the paintings in 2013. They were exhibited in the church before being restored to their original positions on the walls. These large narrative works depicted the founding of the Salesian Congregation and also the Mysteries of the Rosary (joyful, sorrowful and glorious) which presented scenes from the lives of Christ and the Virgin Mary.

²¹ Ref re Montesenario chapel decoration see Carapelli, "Giuseppe Cassioli, pittore e scultore". op. cit.

²² I am indebted to Prof Carapelli for confirmation of this commission. See www.madrecostanza.net/chi_sono_le_adoratrici.html (accessed 20 March 2016) for an image of

clear references to the Christchurch altar in form and decoration, as well as railings, ceiling decoration, and stained glass, all designed by Cassioli.²³ In 1937, for the Basilica della Santissima Annunziata, Florence, he designed a bronze urn to hold the relics of the saint.²⁴ A commission from the Servite fathers at the Grotto in Portland, Oregon, for a large bronze statue of the Blessed Virgin Mary, confirms his continued acceptance of overseas commissions.²⁵

Giuseppe Cassioli died in Florence on 5 October 1942 after an active career of over fifty years. His proficiency in so many media and in so many styles enabled him to very carefully and successfully select the composition and style he considered most appropriate for each work in its particular context.²⁶ In the remainder of this chapter three works will be considered in more detail to support this claim: the door of the Florence Duomo, the tomb of Rossini in S. Croce, and the high altar for Christchurch's Cathedral of the Blessed Sacrament. Cassioli's extensive familiarity with and understanding of the early Renaissance sculptures of the quattrocento are particularly relevant in the discussion of these works. The public reception/appreciation of each of the works will also be examined.

Sources, context and reception:

(a) The north door of the Duomo (S.Maria del Fiore), Florence (1889-1902)

Cassioli was not obliged to match the designs of Passaglia in format or style and deliberately chose to model his work on that of the early Renaissance. Surrounded by the earlier Baptistery doors of Ghiberti and the sacristy doors of Donatello and Luca della Robbia, for example, there was no shortage of inspiration. He included four quatrefoils containing narrative scenes: this choice at once recalls Ghiberti's north doors for the

the altar, which has angels on the altar frontal that are very similar to the gilt-bronze angels in the rectangular panel on the front of the Christchurch altar.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ This urn was made to his design only in 1957 at the urging of the people, after delays caused by WWII. See <http://annunziata.xoom.it/internochiesa.html> (accessed 25 August 2014).

²⁵ The Grotto, Portland Oregon. The bronze statue of the Sorrowful Mother stands on top of a granite monument 150 feet (45 metres) above The Grotto. It is 8½ feet (2.59m) high and weighs 2600 lb (1,179 kg). It was erected to commemorate the 700th anniversary of the founding of the Servite Order. Information supplied by email from The Grotto, February 17, 2016.

²⁶ This is particularly relevant when considering Cassioli's altar for the Cathedral of the Blessed Sacrament, in light of criticisms levelled at it in the 1970s. These will be discussed in the following chapter.

Baptistery (1403-1424) with their simplified New Testament scenes, rather than the square panels of his east doors, the so-called 'Gates of Paradise' (1425-1452) with their elaborately staged and contextualized Old Testament narratives. Cassioli uses the quatrefoils as a stylistic and compositional unifying link across the real space of the piazza between the Duomo and Baptistery.

While Passaglia's doors have been described as exhibiting *un neogoticismo che apparve freddo e scolastico*, Cassioli's have been praised for their freedom and dynamism *e pur attento alla lezione del Quattrocento*.²⁷ The luminosity of his surfaces and his successful reinterpretation of Donatello's invention of flattened relief, *stacciato*, are also lauded by Bigazzi.²⁸ Cassioli's works have also been acknowledged for *la rielaborazione di motivi tardogotici o del primo Rinascimento*.²⁹

His thoughtful approach and painstaking methods are evident in his approach to each panel and to the door as a whole. *The Annunciation*, for example, is contained in a panel placed at the lowest level: the figures are almost in the round and placed as low as possible in the composition, which gives them a strong presence, despite their location. The ground plane on which they rest is also tilted toward the viewer, effectively bringing them closer.

Cassioli however is no mere copyist of earlier works in the vicinity. His Mary resembles a young, gracefully veiled, seated Roman matron with convincing *gravitas*, rather than the elegantly swaying young woman of Ghiberti's more obviously International Style precedent. The panel also displays Cassioli's technical skills and perfectionist working methods. The very high relief figures and the 'sketched' low relief background are handled with equal confidence. There is also evidence that he made six full-size models

³¹ Isabella Bigazzi, "Note sulle porte di bronzo del Duomo di Firenze", in conference proceedings *La Cattedrale come spazio sacro: saggi sul Duomo di Firenze*, Firenze: Edifir, 2001, p.359. Passaglia's doors are also criticized in *Enciclopedia Italiana* (1935), web/online).

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, Volume 21 (1978) (online/web).

of his north door during the development of his final design.³⁰ He even installed a furnace in his own studio, in order to keep close control of the process.³¹

Contemporary Appreciation of Cassioli's North Door of the Duomo

The 1902 edition of Ashton Rollins Willard's comprehensive *Modern Italian Art* includes a detailed and very positive assessment of Cassioli's door, after acknowledging earlier scepticism about the "work of classicists and purists", styles thought by some to have recently passed out of vogue.³² Willard stresses Cassioli's painstaking involvement in every part of the work, "supervising it at every stage down to the final casting."³³ In this review he also cites the artist Matteo Pierotti who commended Cassioli's skills in drawing and composition and "says that the modelling is carried out with a minuteness of detail worthy of a goldsmith".³⁴ Cassioli is here presented to the contemporary English-speaking world as an artist highly skilled in a range of disciplines, and someone who is prepared to go to any lengths to produce intricate work which meets his very high standards.

Cassioli and his north door were also highly praised in *The Magazine of Art* of 1900, at that date a less avant-garde publication than Willard's *History of Modern Italian Art*.³⁵ A full page photograph accompanied the lengthy review, which began with praise of Amos

³⁰ See Ashton Rollins Willard, *History of Modern Italian Art*, 2nd edition, London, New York and Bombay: Longmans, Green and Co., 1902, Supplement, p. 613.

³¹ See Bigazzi, op.cit., p.356-358, for a full description of the pressure brought to bear on Cassioli by the Committee during this process. Finances were apparently a great problem: at one point some of his work was seized until a cleric stood as guarantor.

³² Willard, op. cit., p.6. Willard's book covers sculpture, painting and architecture, chronicling the rise of various styles and schools, and separating the artists into their geographical regions. He notes here that he has found no relevant information in English, but that he has obtained information personally from many of the artists and/or their families: Cassioli is named amongst those who assisted his research in this way.

³³ Ibid. p.431.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ 'Leader Scott', 'The New Bronze Doors of the Florentine Duomo', *The Magazine of Art*, ed. Marion Harry Spielman, London and New York: Cassell, Petter & Galin, Volume 24, 1900, pp.472-474. See Leila Rumbaugh Greiman, 'William Ernest Henley & *The Magazine of Art*, *Victorian Periodicals Review*, Vol. 16, No.2, Summer, 1983, pp.53-64. Greiman traces the magazine's differing focus under its respective editors. Under Galpin's predecessor, Henley (1881-1886), it strongly promoted contemporary French art, particularly that of Rodin. Under Henley, a disciple of Ruskin, it is accused by Greiman, op. cit., pp.61-62, of "almost uninterrupted dullness" due to its "uncompromising conservatism" which followed, rather than led, public taste: it promoted many Royal Academician contributors at this time.

Cassoli as a 'perfect draughtsman' and details of some of his greatest works: the father's reputation reflected well on the son.³⁶

Apparently Giuseppe Cassoli was spoken of by many spectators as "a modern Ghiberti" whose work compared very favourably with that of Passaglia. Cassoli's work is said to show "a deep study of a cinquecento art (sic)", whereas Passaglia's is said to be closer to "the earlier style of Giotto and Andrea Pisano".³⁷ He was determined that his methods would be as "thorough as those of his prototypes from the Renaissance, and if his models were not up to his standard they were broken up and he began again."³⁸ Cassoli wanted to keep control of all stages of the work, and this led to his "daring idea" of setting up a furnace in his own studio: "like a modern Cellini" he was determined to cast his own designs.³⁹ All that leaves his studio must be perfect, and all must have the mark of his own hand on it.⁴⁰ The final bronze work is deemed a great asset for the city: it is "pure in design, rich in expression, and extremely clever in execution."⁴¹ As designer, maker and inspector of every aspect of the work Cassoli assumed maximum personal agency and responsibility for the north door of the Duomo façade.

(b) The Tomb of Rossini, S. Croce, Florence (1902-1905):

Approximately two years after his north door was installed in the façade of the Duomo Cassoli was awarded the prestigious commission for the tomb of Rossini.⁴² This monument has a prominent position in Santa Croce, by that date Italy's National Pantheon; it is placed next to the tomb of the Florentine humanist and Chancellor, Leonardo Bruni executed between 1444 and 1450, by Bernardo Rossellino (1409-1464). (figs.13, 14).⁴³ The Bruni tomb had established a new type of quattrocento tomb monument which balanced architectural and sculptural elements. Cassoli very consciously chose to make his own work complement its famous neighbour in structure, scale and in many elements of the decorative scheme. Cassoli was also influenced by the

³⁶ Ibid. p.472.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid. He was further discouraged by the death of his father in 1891, after which he had to "fight a very difficult battle for himself." Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² See Carappelli, "Pittori toscani", op. cit. p.141.

⁴³ The tombs are located on the right side of the name of S. Croce, near the sanctuary.

tomb of Cardinal Marsuppino found on the opposite wall of the nave, a work carried out between 1459 and 1462 by Desiderio da Settignano (1428-1464).⁴⁴

This thesis argues that Cassioli took elements from both the tombs of Bruni and Marsuppino in Santa Croce, and was also influenced by the tomb of the Cardinal of Portugal in the Florentine church of San Miniato al Monte, executed by Antonio Rossellino (1427-1479), with involvement also by Bernardo Rossellino over the years 1461 and 1466.⁴⁵ The tomb of Rossini is not a mere pastiche; Cassioli's judicious selections and additions have resulted in a distinctive and individual work, which manages at the same time to blend effortlessly into its prestigious surroundings and to harmonise with the nearby mid-fifteenth century tombs of Bruni and Marsuppino.⁴⁶

It is instructive to compare the works as elements from them are cleverly selected and combined in the Rossini tomb, and some are later used again by Cassioli in the Christchurch altar. The tomb of Rossini follows Rossellino's basic arcisolan design but the whole projects into the nave, whereas the Bruni tomb is partly immured.⁴⁷ At the lowest level linked swags of fruit and flowers recall those in the Bruni tomb, though Cassioli separates them by shields rather than by energetic naked putti. The framing pilasters are covered with linked leafy ornaments, whereas the pilasters in the other tombs are fluted. The capitals are similar and the broad architrave of both concludes with a dentilled cornice: below, three panels of red marble are framed in white marble.

In the upper arched compartment, a large roundel contains a male bust, rather than figures of the Virgin and Child as in the prototype. This is highlighted against a plain red marble background. There are no angels or putti in the Cassioli work and in fact no religious motifs at all. There is also no recumbent effigy of the deceased: rather, the elegantly shaped and sparsely decorated sarcophagus makes an impact through its form, its relative plainness, and the placement of the composer's name, in generously rounded capital letters on a broad band which terminates in decorative palmettes, on the side of the

⁴⁴ See for example Mark Bormand, Beatrice Paolozzi Strozzi, Nicholas Penny (eds.), *Desiderio da Settignano. Sculptor of Renaissance Florence*, Washington: National Gallery of Art, 2007, passim.

⁴⁵ These included Luca della Robbia, who was responsible for the ceiling decorations, and Pollaiuolo.

⁴⁶ Ann Markham Schultz, *The Sculptures of Bernardo Rossellino and his Workshop*, Princeton, New Jersey: PUP [Princeton University Press], 1977, p.40.

⁴⁷ It replaced a previous tomb in this position.

sarcophagus facing the viewer. The sarcophagus itself is raised much higher than that of the Bruni tomb. It stands on a base above a high pedestal of figured marble in pinks and greys. Instead of a heavy swag on top of the arch Cassioli places a shorter and lighter trailing ribbon suspended from a lion's mouth above a shield standing at the top of the arch.

From the tomb of Carlo Marsuppini Cassioli may have taken the basic form of the sarcophagus, and a variant of the diaper patterning on its lid can also be found on the lid and underside of the Rossini tomb sarcophagus. The plain red background around his upper roundel recalls that of the tomb of the Cardinal of Portugal. A more obvious borrowing is that of the curtain tied back in front of that tomb. Cassioli repeats this motif and even exaggerates the loop tied back at either side, drawing it away from the arch and providing a decorative sculpted band behind which it can be 'tucked'. Cassioli gives it a complex damask pattern, and gilds it for good measure, so that it provides a rich but restrained additional layer of framing for the tomb structure. Similar use of gilding can be observed on elements of the Marsuppini tomb, which may also have influenced his design.⁴⁸

Cassioli excludes all religious symbolism, replacing it with the allegorical figure of a single mourning woman. She stands just left of centre, before the sarcophagus on its high pedestal, her hands clasped together under her chin. Her gaze is directed at the name of the composer above her head. It is with this figure that Cassioli makes his most significant contribution to the tomb ensemble. It could be linked to a number of classical and quattrocento precedents, but it is argued here that it more strongly demonstrates Cassioli's knowledge and understanding of nineteenth century Italian funerary sculpture.

The neoclassical artist Antonio Canova (1757-1822) had in 1804 and executed the public commemorative monument to Vittorio Alfieri (1804-1810) which is, significantly, also located in S. Croce.⁴⁹ In that work a woman in classical dress stands to the right of centre, her right elbow resting on the sarcophagus, with her hand touching her bowed head. Her gown trails behind her and spills over the edge of the rounded dais on which she stands.

⁴⁸ S. Bietoletti et al. op. cit. p.217.

⁴⁹ Sandra Berresford, *Italian Memorial Sculpture 1820-1940. A Legacy of Love*, London: Frances Lincoln Limited, 2004, p.37, Plate 36.

Regarded as the first sculptural personification of Italy, it ‘also connected sculpture with the idea of a resurgent united Italy’.⁵⁰ Using this association, Cassioli’s mourning female communicates the grief of the whole of Italy for the composer Rossini, and at the same time cleverly removes from the clothing of the figure any specific item or style that could confine her to a particular period.⁵¹

Sandra Berresford, in her vast study of Italian funerary sculpture, insists that ‘knowledgeable citation’ of other works was never regarded as mere plagiarism, but was part of the standard academic training of an artist at that time.⁵² Cassioli’s tomb of Rossini can therefore be seen as a convincing demonstration of his ability to successfully combine elements from a number of mid fifteenth century (and even antique) precedents, so that his work blended with its quattrocento neighbours. At the same time, however, Cassioli succeeded in injecting a more modern note by his inclusion of the figure of the mourning woman which recalls contemporary funerary sculpture.

Contemporary Appreciation of Cassioli’s Tomb of Rossini

The review of the tomb of Rossini in the art journal *Natura ed. Art* notes the influence of the tombs of Bruni and Marsuppini.⁵³ Cassioli’s structure is deemed an excellent example of its type and a worthy tribute to Rossini, *un omaggio signorile, sincero e doveroso a una glorie più pure dell’Italia moderna*.⁵⁴ The only criticism is that the playfulness of Rossini’s music finds no expression in the monument: the female figure is accused of having *un piccola nela freddezza academica*,⁵⁵ Something *più originale, più fresco* would have been more suitable for Rossini.⁵⁶ On the other hand the pensive figure is praised as

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid. The figure was sometimes known as “Harmony”. Many other potential models exist in nineteenth century Italian funerary sculpture. The Monument to Courageous Brescians (1879) by Luigi Pagani (1839-1904), in the Cimitero Vantiniano, Brescia, for example, is one of a number of monuments with such single female figures. Italian cemeteries abound with the living rich tradition of funerary sculpture: as Berresford notes, Italy is the only country in which this tradition did not ever die throughout the nineteenth century. Cassioli’s own teacher, the leading Siennese sculptor, Tito Sarrocchi (1824-1900), was very active in funerary works. In his depiction of the Three Maries at the Tomb (1886), for the tomb of the Campori family, Cimitero di San Cataldo, Modena, the figures show the neoclassical solidity and stillness seen in Cassioli’s figure.

⁵² Ibid. 173. Berresford discusses how plaster casts of famous works were used for this.

⁵³ ‘Il monument a Gioacchino Rossini in S. Croce a Firenze’, *Natura ed, Arte*, Vol. XII, No. 6, 15 February, 1903, p.425.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid. This is rather in the vein of the criticism earlier levelled at Passaglia’s Duomo doors.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

being the one truly modern note in the monument, a pensive symbol, its grief appropriately reflecting that of the whole country on the loss of the composer.⁵⁷

(c) The High Altar, Cathedral of the Blessed Sacrament, Christchurch (1913-1915):

Cassioli, was at pains to produce a work which complemented and acknowledged its setting. He had previously closely studied the physical context for his Duomo door and tomb of Rossini, but in this case had to rely on photographs and other supplied information, supported by what he heard directly from Bishop Grimes.

He did not exactly reproduce the Luttrells' altar, although he referred to the design as being theirs, and its basic form is discernible in his work.⁵⁸ While Cassioli's oeuvre included a number of altar designs, the high altar for Christchurch is believed to have been his largest and most significant.⁵⁹ Unlike the obvious connections between the tomb of Rossini and other tombs in Florence, no particular precedent has been suggested for the altar as a whole, although its sculptural elements may be linked to works of the quattrocento as well as to contemporary sculptural trends. Its basic elements – reredos, altar and *mensa* – are standard and there is nothing really innovative in the overall design.

The Altar's compositional components in context

The Christchurch altar, like the Duomo door and tomb of Rossini, demonstrates Cassioli's knowledge of works from the early Renaissance. Using his various technical skills, he again translates this interest into a work specifically designed for its architectural context, namely the large Cathedral of the Blessed Sacrament, Roman Renaissance in style, with its ultimate source in the ancient Roman basilica (fig.3).

Although very familiar with the classical lexicon, Cassioli limits himself severely in his use of classical ornament. Dentils, acroteria and small circular forms were used repeatedly. Cassioli's ensemble of retable and altar consisted of repeated geometric shapes - the circle, semi-circle, triangle, square and rectangle - in a number of arrangements. An overall tripartite division can be seen in the vertical as well as the horizontal disposition of these geometric elements. When measured from base of the altar

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Cassioli in correspondence....

⁵⁹ The Museo Cassioli in Siena holds some designs for altars and tabernacles but a request for more detailed information was not successful.

steps to the top of the reredos pediment, the area can be divided into two rows of three almost equally sized squares, with a final seventh square at the top containing the shell, arch and pediment. The capitals on the columns of the altar proper were Corinthian, as are those around the gallery of the Cathedral.⁶⁰ It is extremely significant that Riccardo Carapelli, the leading authority on the work of Giuseppe Cassioli, is adamant that the Christchurch altar perfectly complements its architectural setting.⁶¹

Altar/Tomb connections

The reredos of the altar displayed certain similarities with a Florentine tomb of the arcisolian type, such as Cassioli's tomb of Rossini, discussed above. The presence of a central arch; imposing slabs and bands in coloured and white marble; symmetry; centrally focused adoring angels; high base; range of classicizing decorative elements; and pairs of pilasters with sculptured capitals support the claimed connection. The altar and *mensa* together recall the sarcophagus in a tomb sculpture, and indeed the theological correspondence of tomb and altar of sacrifice was a long-standing tradition.⁶²

Quattrocento influences are seen at every level. Above the grey marble base of the reredos, panels of dark green marble were framed by white marble mouldings in the manner of the background panels of the Bruni, Marsuppini and also Rossini tombs, linking the Christchurch structure to such monuments and recalling Cassioli's earlier selection processes. The dark green colour also heightened the impression of the reredos's stability and solidity while the reredos arch, with its patterned border, also recalled the dominant and weighty arches of earlier structures such as the Bruni and Marsuppini tombs.⁶³

Above the arch, in the reredos pediment, a roundel of white marble contains a sculpted dove representing the Holy Spirit, referencing the roundels in the upper levels of the Florentine tombs discussed above, including the tomb of Rossini, although they are all placed under the tomb arch and not on top of it, as here. The earlier tombs and the

⁶⁰ In Fig these are partially obscured by an altar cloth.

⁶¹ Pro. Riccardo Carapelli, email to author, 2 September 2015.

⁶² Theologically and liturgically, this is quite appropriate.

⁶³ The bands on the Bruni and Marsuppini tomb arches were however filled with lush vegetation in high relief, rather than the severe and flatter classical pattern Cassioli uses on the altar arch.

Rossini tomb are also recalled in the composite capitals and engaged columns of the reredos, albeit in slightly simplified form.

The altar proper and Cassioli's sources

The use of plain coloured marble next to the roundels within these squares, as also in the pediment at the top of the altar, recalled Cassioli's distinctive highlighting of the roundel in the tomb of Rossini. Giuseppe Cassioli also carefully used limited amounts of coloured marble, as in the Rossini tomb, to unify the large white marble altar, assert its presence in the sanctuary, and mark its boundaries. The projecting pairs of red marble pilasters, separated by a white marble background, reverse the arrangement on the Bruni, Marsuppini and Rossini tombs, where white marble frames project in front of the background red marble slabs.

Approaching Cassioli's Angels: sources and iconography

The sculpted angels on the altar and reredos (fig. 23) can be seen as further examples of Cassioli's use of early Renaissance sources. Four angels are depicted on the altar and no less than ten (plus the head of a cherub) on the reredos. All are carefully placed in a unified iconographic programme focused entirely on the Blessed Sacrament. The angels gaze fixedly towards the object of their devotion, the central axis on which the exposed Blessed Sacrament is exposed for devotion; the consecrated host is elevated during Mass; and also reserved in the tabernacle.

In the Bruni and Marsuppini tombs, none of the angels are full-length and all exhibit a degree of movement.⁶⁴ Cassioli's angels in the reredos marble relief panels of the reredos are quite different (fig. 19). They form a semicircle of adorers, united in their stability and stillness. The standing angel at the outer edge of each panel inclines slightly toward the Eucharistic focal point. These outermost figures each hold an object – thurible and incense boat - which requires its counterpart opposite in order to function effectively. The kneeling angels in the foreground are closer to the Eucharistic throne yet are in lower relief, making them seem further from the viewer. The two groups are carefully placed in a united, fictive architectural setting which echoes that of the cathedral sanctuary. The relief panels' curving, concave sweep of entablature and columns consciously recall those

⁶⁴ The quattrocento tomb angels adore the Virgin and Child, rather than the Blessed Sacrament.

in the semicircular apse behind the structure, with a balancing convex arrangement within each figural group.⁶⁵

When considering possible sources for these sculptural groups it is instructive to include quattrocento tabernacles of the Blessed Sacrament.⁶⁶ In these structures groups of angels adore the Sacrament, as expected, but the angels all move towards their focus, whereas Cassioli's adoring angels are silent and still.⁶⁷ In Desiderio da Settignano's Tabernacle of the Sacrament (1453-55), for example, the angels entering from side openings positively rush towards the *sportello*, which again forms the back wall of the enclosure.⁶⁸

Cassioli also clothes his angels differently. The fluttering or clinging draperies of most quattrocento angels are absent: instead plain, loose, wide-sleeved tunics covered by an additional layer of drapery are worn. Narrow crossed stoles hanging below waist level complete the raiment of four of the six, while the standing angel with the incense boat wears a heavy draped garment of no particular era. Its counterpart, the angel with the thurible, wears a more liturgical garment which resembles the dalmatic of a deacon, or a shortened version of a priest's alb, with side splits and bands of decoration across the chest and above the hem. Cassioli by this means has acknowledged the regular liturgical action at the altar.⁶⁹ The angels' serene yet grave faces and luxuriant waving hair are perhaps more reminiscent of the classicising works of Luca Della Robbia than the works of Bernardo or Antonio Rossellini or Desiderio da Settignano previously examined.⁷⁰ The

⁶⁵ This is also seen in ancient monuments such as the Arch of Titus (c.82 AD), in which a procession moving towards a distant arch seems to swing towards the viewer at the same time due to the varying depth of relief of the figures concerned.

⁶⁶ Schultz, p.8. Tabernacles of the Sacrament were popular structures embedded in church walls during the second quarter of the fifteenth century, a time when most ecclesiastical sculptures were made for the interiors of churches rather than for their exteriors.

⁶⁷ The wall tabernacles of both Donatello (c.1386-1466) and Bernardo Rossellino, for example, feature groups of standing angels directed towards the central tabernacle. Donatello, in his pioneering Tabernacle of the Sacrament, Sagrestia deo Beneficiati, St. Peter's, Rome (1432-1433) depicts two groups of three young, chubby, standing angels hovering hesitantly at each side of the tabernacle door or *sportello*. Bernardo Rossellino's Tabernacle of the Blessed Sacrament (1450) is now in S. Egidio, Florence. In this work three angels on each side of the *sportello* press forward through lateral openings of an enclosure whose rear wall consists of the tabernacle door. See Schutz, p.8, fig. 202 and fig. 91 respectively.

⁶⁸ Ibid, fig. 173. This tabernacle is found in S. Lorenzo, Florence.

⁶⁹ Cathedral of the Blessed Sacrament, 1950s. Subject not identified: possible visit of Apostolic Nuncio. Slide collection, CCDA.

⁷⁰ See for example Luca della Robbia's Bronze Door for the North Sacristy, Duomo, Florence, (1446-1475) in which nine of the ten relief panels depict a single figure flanked by two adoring or attentive angels, plate 112 in John Pope-Hennessy, *Luca della Robbia*, Oxford: Phaidon, 1980,

diagonal lines of the angels' wings lead the eye to the Eucharistic throne. It is suggested here that these very large wings are a further instance of Cassioli's awareness of contemporary Italian funerary art, for the motif of the angel with large and dramatically extended wings was extremely popular in this period. (fig. 19)⁷¹

Behind the angels in both panels a sculpted curtain, with a repeated pattern of quatrefoils within linked circles, is stretched tautly below the entablature. While curtains also feature in the tomb of Rossini and, more prominently, in the tomb of the Cardinal of Portugal, they hang in front of their respective tombs.⁷² The pattern on the curtain is another element which reflects the concave architectural setting: it is not merely a flat decorative backdrop.⁷³ Victor M. Schmidt explores the various uses of fictive curtains in 15th century Florentine works, when the motif became fashionable in paintings with non-narrative religious subjects.⁷⁴ They served as a status symbol for purchasers and patrons and, in a religious context underlined the "solemnity of the liturgy".⁷⁵ The sculpted brocade curtain here serves to link the relief panels to the actual brocade vestments of the clergy regularly officiating at the altar, uniting and transcending time and space.

Cassioli succeeds in striking a delicate balance here. The curtain highlights and frames the sacred figures, bringing them closer to the viewer.⁷⁶ At the same time it serves as an

and the artist's *Mugello Lunette*, (c.1450-1455), enamelled terracotta, Bode Museum, Berlin, Plates 96. 98-99. Pope-Hennessy also, on p.66, compares the bowed heads of the solemn angels in della Robbia's many Madonna panels with the diffident attitude of servers at Mass. He discerns the influence of Michelozzo on the style of all three figures in the *Mugello Lunette*.

⁷¹ See for example the tomb of Augusto Forti (1909) by Gina Nicoli (and Giovanni Beretta) in Berresford, op. cit., page 58, plate 71.

⁷² The patterning recalls that used for the decorative technique of damascening, in which similar patterns are made on sculptures by inlaying precious metals, such as gold and silver. For a discussion of the use of this technique in fifteenth century Florence, and an analysis of an example with a diamond shaped pattern with a small quatrefoil in the centre of each shield, see John Pope-Hennessy, op. cit. pp.70-71.

⁷³ It is noted that while the apse columns are of the Ionic order, the fictive columns of the relief panels are not of any of the major orders.

⁷⁴ Victor M. Schmidt, "Curtains, *Revelatio*, and Pictorial Reality in Late Medieval Renaissance Italy", in Kathryn M. Rudy and Barbara Baert (Eds.), *Weaving, Veiling, and Dressing. Textiles and their Metaphors in the Late Middle Ages*, Turnhout: Brepols Publishers, 2007, pp.191-214.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid. p.208. Schmidt also notes that this can include subtle hierarchical distinctions. While the sacred figures here are not shown in the process of being actually 'unveiled', as in so many Florentine paintings (and indeed sculptures) they are nonetheless highlighted. Schmidt discusses the common use of real protective curtains for many fifteenth century art works. These were dramatically parted on special occasions to reveal the image. An altar reredos is a different proposition, obviously.

‘aesthetic boundary’ by precluding the depiction of deeper pictorial space behind the angels.⁷⁷

The Gilt Bronze Angels supporting the Eucharistic Throne

The two slender angels flanking the throne resemble the elegant figures in the works of Ghiberti more than those of his successors (fig. 20). They hold wheat and grapes, the elements of the Eucharistic bread and wine, and gaze devotedly towards the space reserved for exposition of the Sacrament. A pair of angels hovers below them in front of a six-winged seraph, supporting the throne base. All four angels wear the same loose, wide sleeved tunic and the upper pair also have narrow crossed stoles. They also share the same facial features, expression and hair. None has a halo in what could be a tacit acknowledgement that even the holiness of angels pales next to that of the Host. Together they form one glittering yet rather mysterious mass in the apse recess, set back from the frontal plane of the marble panels. The iconographic programme culminates at this point. Although perhaps particularly fitting for the Cathedral of the Blessed Sacrament, angels were commonly depicted on Catholic altars, for they are believed to be present at every Mass.⁷⁸

The Angels of the Altar Fontal Panel

In this gilt bronze panel (fig. 220) a pair of flying angels share the proportions, poses, faces, wings and drapery of the angels supporting the Eucharistic throne, but more closely resemble the fluttering quattrocento angels of the tombs and tabernacles discussed above.⁷⁹ They are bare-armed and their stoles are transformed into flying banderoles. The arrangement of figures and mandorla also recalls the classical sculptural tradition of victory figures supporting a wreath or panel enclosing an inscription, a tradition seen in

⁷⁷ Ibid. p.211. For a similar effect see the marble relief panel by Luca dell Robbia, part of the tabernacle commissioned in 1441 for Santa Maria, Peretola, reproduced in Pope-Hennessy, op. cit., plates 38 and 39, in which two angels/victories stand against an elaborate suspended curtain with a rich lower border and fringe. Pope-Hennessy further suggests that the brocaded curtain was probably painted/pigmented.

⁷⁸ On the exterior of the building, two large kneeling angels of Oamaru stone are a dominant feature over the entrance portico, and in the sanctuary two large statues of adoring angels were also transferred from the pro-cathedral.

⁷⁹ The length of this panel is three times its height. Its elongated proportions allow for the inclusion of two fully extended figures.

the sarcophagus of the Bruni tomb (fig. 13).⁸⁰ The highly polished surfaces of the bent arms lead the eye to the mandorla between the angels that encloses a decorated chalice and a Host from which rays emanate, forming the shape of a monstrance, strongly reinforcing the Eucharistic iconography of the reredos.⁸¹

The Altar Roundels

Two gilt bronze half-length angels in roundels on the altar frontal (fig. 21) are presented almost frontally, with faces turned towards the central panel, keeping the focus of the whole ensemble on the Eucharist. The finely detailed hair, facial features, wings and drapery of these figures are consistent with his figures on the north door of the façade of the Duomo, S. Maria del Fiore.⁸² The combination of gilt bronze, the roundel format with an emerging figure also echo quattrocento works such as Ghiberti's self-portrait on the East door of the Florence Baptistery, and Cassioli's own self-portrait emerging from a roundel on his Duomo door.⁸³

The placement of all these gilded bronze figures and relief panels on the altar itself, or immediately above it on the reredos, is significant. These most precious materials are concentrated in the central and most sacred part of the structure.⁸⁴ When viewed in combination with brass candlesticks, vases and reliquaries, in flickering candlelight during Mass or even more at Exposition, when even more lit candles would frame the monstrance on its throne, both altar and throne would literally glow.

Conclusion

This thesis argues that although it cannot be conclusively proved that Cassioli based particular elements in his altar and reredos for the Cathedral of the Blessed Sacrament on particular monuments known to him, it is valid to note similarities in light of his working methods as seen in the earlier Duomo door and tomb of Rossini. The latter work, in particular, does show the clear influence of quattrocento works from the same location, S.

⁸⁰ Tomb of Bruni (has inscript supported by victories). Schultz, p.39, claims that Rossellino's arrangement was influenced in turn by a work of Lorenzo Ghiberti, the Shrine of SS. Protus, Hyacinth and Nemesius, (1426-1428), made for S. Maria desli Angeli, Florence. Scultz, Plate 165.

⁸¹ Cassioli was praised for the luminosity of the surfaces of the right door of the Duomo. See Bigazzi, p.359.

⁸² Although not contractually confirmed to be solely the work of Cassioli.

⁸³ ... re Ghibert's self-portrait... and Cassioli's self-portrait....

⁸⁴ The unique presence of mosaic or intarsia lily stems behind the throne is a further example of the special treatment of this part of the structure.

Croce, or elsewhere in Florence. The Christchurch altar and reredos may also show his familiarity with contemporary fashions in Italian public funerary sculpture. The altar's iconographic programme has a single focus – the adoration of the Eucharist – which is reinforced by the number and placement of a host of adoring angels, reinforced by depictions of the Host and chalice, grapes and wheat.

Chapter Five

Changing attitudes to the Cassioli altar: its removal and replacement by the Warren altar

The Cassioli altar as embodiment of the cathedral: examples

In the decades following the altar's installation, its image was often used as a symbol of the whole building, and one which represented its most important aspects. A good example is the carefully hand-painted card presented to Bishop Brodie, the successor of Bishop Grimes, on the occasion of his episcopal silver jubilee in 1941.¹ This is a "spiritual bouquet", an offering of an itemised list or "bouquet" of prayers and devotions, presented to him by the Sisters of Notre Dame des Missions. A series of "doors" opens successively on the front of the presentation.² What is finally revealed, at its heart, beneath a protective tissue, cut to shape, is an extremely detailed painting of the high altar (fig. 27).³ The painted altar lies at the heart of the "bouquet" as the high altar and tabernacle lie at the heart of the cathedral. It recalls, in miniature, the tradition of European altarpieces, with their painted wings that are folded back on special occasions to reveal a sacred person or scene.⁴

In 1950 the province of Canterbury celebrated its centenary and depictions of the high altar featured prominently in commemorative issues in the Catholic media. The *New Zealand Tablet* featured a full-page photograph of the sanctuary and high altar, taken from the nave, with two additional almost half-page photographs taken from different places in the gallery (fig. 28).⁵ *Zealandia* offered a half-page photograph of the sanctuary and altar, taken during a special Mass of the Blessed Sacrament.⁶ Cardinal Norman Gilroy of Sydney attended as guest of honour and his commemorative gift was a

¹ The official date of Bishop Matthew Joseph Brodie's jubilee was 27 February, 1941.

² The doors depict the Last Supper, Christ with small children, the Virgin Mary as Queen of the Missions, St. Joseph, St. Matthew and St. John the Baptist (patron of the Diocese). It also includes the bishop's episcopal and family crests.

³ It is a tiny but convincing depiction of the altar, "correct" in most particulars, although the bronze panel in the altar front seems to show a central circular medallion rather than a mandorla.

⁴ One famous example amongst hundreds is *The Last Judgement* polyptych, 1446-52, oil on wood, 215 x 560 cm, Musée de l'Hôtel-Dieu, Beaune, by Rogier van der Weyden (1400-1464).

⁵ *New Zealand Tablet*, 22 November, 1950, pp. 13, 24-25. The full-page photograph of the altar on p.13 has the caption "The Cathedral of the Blessed Sacrament, Christchurch".

⁶ *Zealandia*, 23 November, 1950, p.8.

photograph of the high altar.⁷ The 1950 annual magazine of Sacred Heart College, the girls' school next to the cathedral, included several large photographs of the altar in its account of the centenary celebrations.⁸ As late as 1972 it was still on occasion singled out for high praise in some general publications.⁹

The Need for Conservation – late 1960s

There is little documentation of any sort concerning the altar from the 1950s and 1960s. The general state of the fabric of the building, however, was causing increasing concern.¹⁰ It was Bishop Brian Ashby (1964-1985) who made the decision that major work could no longer be deferred.¹¹ The consequences for the Cassioli altar are examined in this chapter.

In October 1968 Bishop Ashby convened a Conservation Committee, although its deliberations remained confidential for some time after its inception.¹² Possible changes to the interior were discussed and included “alteration to the sanctuary in keeping with the Liturgy”.¹³ Sub-committees responsible for finance, the building's exterior, and the interior (later to be termed the liturgical sub-committee) were subsequently formed.¹⁴ At its second meeting Professor Simpson, a member of the committee and Professor of Fine Arts at the University of Canterbury, advised the committee that the work was to be one of what he defined as “conservation” rather than “restoration”, for, in his words:

⁷ His note of thanks of 3 March 1951 is held in CCDA.

⁸ *Magazine of the Sacred Heart Girls' College, Christchurch, New Zealand 1950*.

⁹ For example, Errol Braithwaite, *The Companion Guide to the South Island of New Zealand*, Auckland and London: Collins, 1972 includes the following on p.13: “Its interior is gorgeous with mosaic tiles, and its marble altar is magnificent.”

¹⁰ The City Engineer, Peter Scoular, for example, wrote to Bishop Brian Ashby on 31 January, 1966, urging that the decaying stonework be examined by a professional in the interests of public safety: letter 31 January, 1966, from City Engineer's Office, Christchurch City Council, CCDA. This is discussed by Hanrahan, pp.85-86, together with the recommendations of reports commissioned by the two preceding bishops.

¹¹ Bishop Ashby resigned as Bishop of Christchurch in 1985 and died on 5 June 1988.

¹² Its minutes are held in CCDA. See Hanrahan, p.86-87, for the composition of the committee and its early experiments concerning various cleaning methods to determine how best the Oamaru stone of the building should be treated.

¹³ Minutes of meeting held 7 October 1968, in which Fr. Clark noted that the estimate produced by engineers would not cover these required changes, *inter alia*.

¹⁴ *Ibid.* p.86.

The character of the building will inevitably be changed as it would be utterly impossible to restore it to its original condition.¹⁵

Whether his distinction between the terms was actually understood in the years to come is debatable. This interpretation of “conservation”, the term so often repeated in the ensuing fundraising campaign, could account for much of the confusion and distress of many in the diocese during the years that followed.

Estimates for costs were sought during 1969 and the suggestion made by building contractors in September that marble from the high altar be used not only for a replacement altar, but also for a lectern and Bishop’s Chair.¹⁶ It is therefore quite clear that the removal of the Cassioli altar was envisaged well before the Conservation Appeal was formally launched. By December 1969 a detailed brief concerning changes to the interior had been produced by the “Liturgical Brief sub-committee” and this was regarded as confidential.¹⁷

Bishop Ashby had determined on a short period of fund-raising, aimed at all Catholic wage-earners of the diocese, and this was announced in a Pastoral Letter on 28 June, 1970.¹⁸ It clearly states that:

The Conservation programme also calls for updating the interior of the Cathedral to suit the demands of modern liturgy.

although no details of planned changes are provided.¹⁹

It was to be a campaign that involved and united the diocese. A number of professionally-designed information and fund-raising materials were produced as part of the

¹⁵ Minutes of the Cathedral Restoration Committee, 30 October, 1968, Point 5, CCDA.

¹⁶ Letter of 28 September 1969, R.L. Kennedy Ltd. Building Contractors, to Fr. Clark, p.2. CCDA. It also included a quotation of \$6,000-\$7,000 to “Remove High Altar and Rebuild in existing Marble”, *ibid.* p.1.

¹⁷ Letter by Fr. Clark to Bishop Ashby, 2 December 1969, which includes the following: “Some suggestions contained in it could cause very strong reaction unless properly explained and presented.” CCDA.

¹⁸ Pastoral letter to be read at all parishes on Sunday, 28 June 1970. CCDA. The campaign was successful and resulted in \$158,000 being raised in a little over twelve months. See also Hanrahan, p.88.

¹⁹ Bishop Ashby: Pastoral Letter to be read at all Masses, Sunday, 28th June, 1970. CCDA.

Conservation Appeal and must be examined in detail, for the Cassioli altar is conspicuous by its absence in them.

In addition to a letter of support from the Christchurch Civic Trust, and some historical material, the Conservation Appeal booklet includes eight photographs of the interior of the cathedral and three of its exterior.²⁰ In one of these Bishop Ashby is shown standing in front of the sanctuary and a small section of the Cassioli altar can just be seen in the darker background: between the two a recent temporary wooden altar positioned is visible.²¹ There is also a photograph of the interior as it was just before its opening in 1905 (fig.6) showing the Kimbell/Button wooden altar from the pro-cathedral in place.²² No other photographs of the interior include the altar. The major works of the Conservation Project are listed and include “Rearrangement of Sanctuary area to meet needs of modern liturgy”.²³

A companion booklet entitled *The Cathedral of the Blessed Sacrament. What is a Cathedral?* provides information concerning the history, interior and exterior of the building.²⁴ Although the bishop’s cathedra, baptismal font, stained glass windows, and mosaic sanctuary floor are described in detail, the Cassioli altar is acknowledged only as “the marble altar” and the section on the interior concludes with the following:

When the architect planned the sanctuary the seven fluted Corinthian [sic] pillars at the back of the altar were to be a feature. Early pictures of the Cathedral show a simple table, as the altar, offset by these columns.²⁵

This is all decidedly odd. While the wooden throne is criticized for its Gothic style, which “clashes with the Roman style of the rest of the Cathedral”, the very Roman

²⁰ This letter of 29 June 1970 is a shortened version of the Pastoral Letter of 28 June, and includes no mention of changes to the interior of the cathedral.

²¹ Date of placement of this temporary altar has not been confirmed. (1965...1970... range).

²² Conservation Appeal 1970, booklet, op. cit. n .p. caption “1904. Gleaming Splendour”.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Most Revd. Brian P. Ashby D.D., *The Cathedral of the Blessed Sacrament. What is a Cathedral?* n. d.

²⁵ Ibid. Note that the columns in the sanctuary apse are in fact Ionic: those above them in the gallery are Corinthian. In the CCDA collection a newspaper cutting from an unidentified publication, dating from the completion of the conservation project, adds to the “myth” of Petre’s intentions: his youngest child, Margaret, still alive in 1975, says “Actually, the original idea would have been a long table”. This is obviously at odds with Francis Petre’s own design for a high altar with reredos and canopy (fig....)

Cassioli altar is ignored. The fluted columns of the sanctuary apse were certainly obscured more by the Cassioli altar than by the Kimball/Button altar from the pro-cathedral, but they were still visible. It must be remembered that the altar designed by the architect Francis Petre (fig. 9) included a high canopy resting on four large stone columns which are clearly shown in Petre's original plan that is actually reproduced in this booklet. The author of the booklet misrepresents the architect's intentions and this issue of allegedly conforming to "the mind of the architect" is taken up in the media coverage of the conservation programme, discussed later in this chapter. The material in this booklet is derived largely from a typed document with additional background information and descriptions of the cathedral and its contents.²⁶ This refers to "the six fluted corinthic (sic) pillars at the back of the altar...and early pictures show a simple table as the altar".²⁷ Astonishingly, the document refers to the altar and reredos as being out of harmony with the Roman Renaissance cathedral because they are "Gothic [sic] in character"!²⁸ They are acknowledged as being "fine examples of craftsmanship" but that is the limit of their praise.²⁹

A third publication from the time of the 1970 Appeal presents a series of commonly asked questions and their answers, including the need to spend money on the interior.³⁰ The reply notes that there were very limited funds for furnishings in 1905, and while acknowledging donations (bells, chapel, some windows) it asserts that most of the furniture came from the pro-cathedral (more windows, most statues, sanctuary lamps).³¹ There is no mention at all of the high altar. This is surely a deliberate omission in this context. The reply to the question "What are you going to do inside the Cathedral?" includes the following:

Modern Liturgy requires some changes in interior layout of the Cathedral and its altar (there can be only one altar in the Sanctuary and it should face the people) and in the provision of a Blessed Sacrament Chapel in the two transept chapels.³²

²⁶ "Cathedral of the Blessed Sacrament. Conservation Project. 1970." Box: Cathedral Restoration 1966-1976, CCDA,

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ "Well, what's going on at the Cathedral now?", n.d., Box: Cathedral Restoration 1966-1976, CCDA.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

How any of this would affect the Cassioli altar is not explained.³³ The plans for the re-ordering and drawings by the appointed Miles Warren of Warren and Mahoney show the planned removal of the Cassioli altar and are dated 1970. They are reproduced in figs ..

Almost twelve months after the launch of the Appeal the Conservation Committee formally considered the future of the altar and reredos.³⁴ Bishop Ashby stressed the importance of finding a suitable new location, and urged that:

suitable publicity be considered to reassure those who wish to see the altar given a position in keeping with its beauty and dignity.³⁵

Although the updating of the sanctuary “to meet the needs of modern liturgy” was seen as a priority in the work planned for the interior, this was to follow the programme of cleaning and urgent repairs.³⁶ Fixing the (leaking) dome was seen as the most urgent need.³⁷

In late 1972 the Liturgical Sub-committee discussed the “suitable disposal of the existing altar and reredos”, including the possible re-erection of the reredos on some other site, or the reuse of some parts within the cathedral, possibly attached to a wall.³⁸ Seven months later, in June 1973, the Liturgical Sub-committee held a special meeting to consider the disposal of the high altar, reredos, and side chapel altars. This meeting marks a critical point in the history of the Cassioli altar.³⁹

Some of the altar’s marble and “bronzework” were to be retained “for historical reasons” and the architect appointed for the interior re-ordering, Miles Warren, was to be given the authority to select pieces for mounting “in the gallery walls and alcoves”.⁴⁰ The “top slab” of the altar and the “bronze console bracket from the reredos” were also to be kept,

³³ By 1970 many Catholic churches had separated the altar proper from its reredos and moved the altar forward to become a freestanding structure which would enable Mass to be said facing the people. Some Catholics assumed this could and would be done in this case.

³⁴ Minutes of meeting of Cathedral Conservation Committee, 18 May 1971. CCDA.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ See for example, Bishop Ashby, Letter to Diocese, 31 May 1971. CCDA.

³⁷ Minutes of meeting of the Cathedral Conservation Committee, 18 May, 1971. CCDA.

³⁸ Minutes of meeting of the Liturgical Sub-committee, 28 November 1972. CCDA. Mr. A. Arts made the suggestion concerning possible reuse of some parts or panels by fixing them to a wall.

³⁹ Minutes of meeting of the Liturgical Sub-committee, 28 June 1973. CCDA.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

while the remaining marble was to be placed on the aisle floors at either side of the sanctuary, there to be stored under the new wooden superstructure designed by Miles Warren to extend the usable space of the sanctuary (fig. 32)⁴¹ It was agreed that photographs of the high altar were also to be taken before and during the demolition process, to be retained as an historical record.⁴²

These decisions were confirmed and clarified at the subsequent meeting, at which further instructions for the architect were drawn up.⁴³ If the altar were to be removed the relocation of the tabernacle would have to be considered. Bishop Ashby, in a letter to Cardinal McKeefry, notes that the main committee could not see how the altar and tabernacle could be retained in the sanctuary: “However, nothing has been publicized yet”.⁴⁴ The bishop next asked Archbishop Bugnini, at that time Secretary of the Sacred Congregation for Divine Worship at the Vatican, whether many churches placed the tabernacle outside the sanctuary and whether the Vatican’s position was likely to change.⁴⁵ Archbishop Bugnini replied that the proposal was in accord with current legislation.⁴⁶

It was time for the approved detailed proposals to be made public and for comments to be sought from clergy and laity. The Catholic media duly reported that changes to the interior were imminent and at this point the attacks on the Cassioli altar began in earnest. The *New Zealand Tablet* reported that the “elaborate high altar of marble and bronze, installed in 1916, is out of place” and noted that the seven columns in the sanctuary were

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² No record of any such photographs has been found in CCDA.

⁴³ Minutes of meeting of the Liturgical Sub-committee, 12 July 1973. Appendix 1 of these minutes confirms the architect’s responsibility to choose suitable pieces for remounting in the gallery and gallery alcoves, and that “Other marble not gifted by the Bishop to other churches in the Diocese, is to be laid in the side aisles adjacent to the sanctuary”. CCDA.

⁴⁴ Letter by Bishop Ashby to Cardinal McKeefry, 2 October 1973. CCDA.

⁴⁵ Letter by Bishop Ashby to Archbishop Bugnini, 15 November 1973. CCDA. He also enclosed his 1971 publication, *The Church Building*, for the archbishop’s information, and referred to the document *De Sacra Communionem et De Cultu Mysteriorum Eucharistici Extra Missam* issued in June 1973.

⁴⁶ Bishop Ashby reported his enquiry and the response in a letter to the clergy of the diocese on 5 February 1974. CCDA.

“prominently in view” before its installation, as intended by the architect.⁴⁷ “Rubbish” accumulated over the years would also go.⁴⁸ The *Zealandia* report opened with:

The high altar in the Christchurch Cathedral of the Blessed Sacrament, regarded architecturally as monstrous, is to go. So is a lot of other “rubbish” which has cluttered the magnificent church for more than half a century.⁴⁹

The Cassioli altar is further derided for being “an unfitting focal point of the splendid building – like dandelions among gladioli”.⁵⁰ Both publications include a reproduction of Miles Warren’s re-designed sanctuary, showing the proposed new altar and President’s Chair, surrounded by low stools, in the sanctuary. These allow the apse columns to be seen clearly from the nave.⁵¹

The Christchurch *Press* at first reported only that “The high altar in the sanctuary will be removed”, and a few days later reproduced Miles Warren’s depiction of the proposed sanctuary (fig. 33).⁵² In the same issue of the *Press* it was reported separately that objections were being made to change the interior. A meeting organized by the Church authorities provided a public forum for discussion of the proposals.⁵³ Thus began a lengthy battle by those opposed to the changes. For the purposes of this thesis it is not necessary to provide a complete chronology, but it is instructive to note the grounds on which complaints were made. Specifically, while the protest group often referred to the “beauty” of the Cassioli altar, this was never more fully explained. Further, the fact that it was the work of Giuseppe Cassioli, who had designed and made a door for the Florence Duomo and the tomb of Rossini in Santa Croce, was also never mentioned by those who argued for the altar’s retention. Their approach was twofold. Firstly, it was very beautiful, and secondly it was a symbol, almost a personification, of the “traditional Catholic concept of worship”.⁵⁴ In other words, the Cassioli altar and existing sanctuary arrangements were perceived as embodying a different theology of the Eucharist: the

⁴⁷ *New Zealand Tablet*, 20 February 1974, p.16.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.* p.17.

⁴⁹ Terry McGoverne, “Re-design for high altar”, *Zealandia*, 24 February, 1974, p.3.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ The effect is heightened in Miles Warren’s sketch due to the dark background painted in behind the columns.

⁵² *Press*, 11 February 1974, p.14 and 16 February 1974, p.11.

⁵³ This was held in St Patrick’s Hall on 17 February. In the *Press*, 22 February 1974, Fr. Clark judged it a success, while Mrs. A.J. O’Sullivan, of the protest committee, stated that there was “a general feeling of disgust” at the meeting.

⁵⁴ *The Press*, 26 February, 1974, p.18.

proposed altar and sanctuary furnishings were so different that they were seen as being incompatible with tradition. At a subsequent public meeting, organized by the protesters, members of the sub-committee were asked:

if the new liturgy – which emphasizes the presence of Christ in the believing community rather than in the Blessed Sacrament alone, could not be implemented without the expense, or the “violation”, of the altar?⁵⁵

Herein lies one of the main differences in the outlook of protesters and church leaders. The focus of attention in the sanctuary when the Cassioli altar and its predecessor were in place was the altar and reredos, with a centrally placed tabernacle. Now the tabernacle was to be moved to a newly created side chapel, and the imposing reredos dismembered and not replaced. Instead, in a more forward position, the new and imposing President’s Chair was to be given the dominant position, flanked by a number of low stools. In front of this a new altar, much simpler in form and lacking decoration, was to be placed closer to the congregation, where a temporary wooden altar had been for some years. It was all to be so different; and seems to have genuinely come as a huge shock to many who had never thought that “conservation” could include such drastic changes.⁵⁶

In April 1974 Bishop Ashby announced that the proposed alterations would proceed and the Conservation Committee accepted all recommendations, including a deeper investigation concerning possible placement of parts of the existing altar “in a more visible form”, and “ways of allowing the mosaic floor to remain in view”.⁵⁷ He also advised Miles Warren of the possibility of injunction, asking him to ensure that:

our workmen are thoroughly conversant with the demolition of the old high altar, in case circumstances force me to have this done at a moments (sic) notice.⁵⁸

Soon after this, in reply to a published letter of complaint by Fr. G.H. Duggan S.M., Bishop Ashby insisted, quite without any supporting evidence:

⁵⁵ Ibid. The number present was estimated at around 400.

⁵⁶ See again the minutes of the Cathedral Restoration Committee, 30 October 1968, Point 5, for Professor John Simpson’s mindful distinction between conservation and restoration: the committee was reminded by him that the latter was quite impossible. CCDA.

⁵⁷ *Press*, 6 April 1974, p.2. It had earlier been suggested that the entire sanctuary be carpeted.

⁵⁸ Letter from Bishop Ashby to Miles Warren, 30 April 1974.

It is a matter of documented history that the architect, Mr. Petre, tried in vain to prevent the present high altar being built, as it destroyed his whole concept of the sanctuary area.⁵⁹

Attempts by the Sanctuary Preservation Committee to involve the Christchurch City Council, (in association with the Historic Places Trust and Institute of Architects), and the Apostolic Nuncio, were all unsuccessful.⁶⁰

The Cathedral was closed on 30 September 1974: the altar was finally removed and the sanctuary stripped of all furnishings by 12 October 1974 (fig. 35), and was scheduled to be reopened on 20 October.⁶¹ The altar, lectern/pulpit and Presidential Chair designed by the architect Miles Warren were installed (fig. 36).

What became of the Cassioli Altar?

Monsignor Harrington, the Cathedral Administrator, had announced on 30 September that:

The altar will be dismantled carefully and the best pieces of the marble and bronze work will be retained in the Cathedral, mounted in the galleries: some of the marble will be used in the Blessed Sacrament Chapel, the baptistery, and elsewhere.⁶²

The marble relief panels from the reredos were moved to the east and west walls of the Lady Chapel, on the north side of the Cathedral (figs. 40 – 42). The adoring angels in these panels now gaze across the space of the chapel and aisle towards the nave. The gilt bronze panel from the altar frontal was set into the front of a new altar-like structure in the Memorial Chapel: this was constructed to house the names of those who donated to the Conservation Appeal (figs. 43 – 44). The Eucharistic iconography of the panel, with its adoring angels, chalice and Host, had no immediate connection with the Memorial Chapel in which it was now placed. The two gilt bronze angels in roundels, also from the altar frontal, were placed on the sides of the same structure in the Memorial Chapel, with similar loss of connection between location and meaning. The marble roundel with its sculpted dove/Holy Spirit from the summit of the reredos was set at eye level into the wall in the south-west corner of the nave. The marble cross from above this roundel was

⁵⁹ Bishop Ashby to Fr Duggan. CCDA.

⁶⁰ See *Press*, 19 March 1974, for a report of the Council meeting of 18 March. The minutes of the meeting were subsequently sent to Bishop Ashby. The Apostolic Pro-Nuncio advised the protesters on 22 March 1974 that he had no jurisdiction in such matters. CCDA.

⁶¹ *Press*, 12 October 1974, p.1.

⁶² Handwritten notes by Mons. James Harrington, CCDA.

also placed in this chapel.⁶³ The gilt-bronze group of angels supporting the Eucharistic throne was apparently kept in the Bishop's Sacristy for some years, but disappeared at an unknown date.⁶⁴

The immediate and ultimate fate of the marble elements of the altar is not at all clear. Despite the resolution to retain the marble under the raised sides of the newly extended sanctuary, noted above, the *Star* reported in 1977 that marble from the altar had earlier been sold to Thomas Andrews and Sons, monumental masons.⁶⁵ The marble ledge below the tabernacle in the Blessed Sacrament Chapel is said to have come from the Cassioli altar.⁶⁶ No evidence has been found of the reuse of any elements from the Cassioli altar in any other churches in the diocese. In 1996 it was asserted in print that the altar was still in storage in the cathedral and could be reinstated if required.⁶⁷ It seems however that this plan was not in fact carried out.⁶⁸

Lack of appreciation of the Cassioli altar – going for “Baroque”

The Cassioli altar has been described as “baroque”.⁶⁹ Although this term was not applied to it at the time of its installation or during subsequent decades, from the 1960s onwards it was used to convey a number of negative messages.

Firstly, it was used to clarify alleged stylistic and/or periodic inappropriateness: the cathedral and the altar were said to be a stylistic mismatch. Whereas the building was Roman Renaissance, the altar was Baroque with a capital B. This provided an argument

⁶³ Mons. James Harrington's column “In and About the Cathedral” on the Cathedral Parish weekly bulletin of 13 July 1975. CCDA.

⁶⁴ Conversation with Fr. Kevin Clark, Archivist, CCDA, May 2015.

⁶⁵ *Christchurch Star*, 16 April, 1977, pp.1, 3. This company is no longer registered. Efforts to locate the whereabouts of any of the marble concerned have been unsuccessful but are ongoing.

⁶⁶ Peb Simmons, *No Ordinary Woman*, Auckland, David Bateman Ltd, 1997, p.160. Peb Simmons claims that her mother, Ria Bancroft, the sculptor responsible for the tabernacle doors in this chapel, used a piece of grey-white marble from the altar and “patinated it to a warm pale terracotta”. This is surprising, as the marble in question always looked very grey.

⁶⁷ *Press*, 27 July 1996, p.2. This news item appeared in the context of the recent reinstatement of the high altar of St. Joseph's Cathedral, Dunedin, which had been in the Dunedin Art Gallery since 1971. The item here appears under the heading “Altar on stand-by”.

⁶⁸ Conversation with Fr. Kevin Clark, November 2014. Events during this period of the conservation programme apparently became rather chaotic and not all agreed steps were carried out. It remains to be seen whether any of the marble is in storage under the raised floor.

⁶⁹ For example, Hanrahan, op. cit. p.78, most recently uses this term to describe the Cassioli altar.

for its removal from a building universally praised as being the “finest basilica in the country”.⁷⁰

Such an alleged disconnect is not in itself a criticism of “baroque” as a style. But is it even justified to apply this stylistic label to the Cassioli altar? If not, then the argument of incongruity is completely negated. A number of authors acknowledge that it is difficult to be precise about this “total art”, in which architecture, sculpture and painting often combine to engage the viewer.⁷¹ Christopher Braidler’s extensive list of attributes includes fondness for dynamism; agitation; energetic spiralling; asymmetric diagonals; and trompe l’oeil.⁷² Mark A. Togerson stresses its elaborate illusionism; its sweeping movements; and its many curves and swirls in its wealth of detailing.⁷³

From Anthony Blunt’s collection of characteristics of “baroque” architecture, only two - largeness of scale and richness of materials - could with any justification be applied to the Cassioli altar.⁷⁴ Cassioli’s marble angels remain chastely in their framed reliefs; the structure has a clear symmetry and order; there is no overt emotionalism. They certainly dominate the iconography of the Cassioli altar.⁷⁵ They are not examples however of the “adolescent androgyny” which Careri observes as a feature of baroque angels.⁷⁶ There is no sensuality of this sort in the Cassioli altar.⁷⁷

⁷⁰ Terence Hodson, *Looking at the Architecture of New Zealand*, Wellington: Grantham House, 1990, p.143.

⁷¹ See for example Peter Burke, *Eyewitnessing. The Uses of Images as Historical Evidence*, Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 2001, p.58, and Giovanni Careri, *Baroques*, Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2003, p.13.

⁷² Christopher Braidler, *Refiguring the Real. Picture and Modernity in Word and Image 1400-1700*, Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1993, p.151.

⁷³ Mark A. Togerson, *An Architecture of Immanence. The Architecture for Worship and Ministry Today*, Michigan and Cambridge, U.K: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007, p.268.

⁷⁴ Anthony Blunt, *Some Uses and Misuses of the Terms Baroque and Rococo as applied to architecture*, London: Oxford University Press, London, 1973, p.8. Blunt, on p.5, traces the use of the term for both period and style to the writings of Wöfflin, 1915.

⁷⁵ Careri, op. cit. p.95.

⁷⁶ Ibid. Careri claims that angels have a special place in the “Baroque conception of humanity’s participation in grace”.

⁷⁷ See Jane Eade, “Power and Sacred Art”, in eds. Michael Snodin and Nigel Llewellyn, *Baroque 1620-1800. Style in the Age of Magnificence*, South Kensington, London: V & A Publishing, 2009, p.241, for a discussion of the erotic qualities of baroque art, to which she attributes some of the later negative judgements of the style.

“Baroque” has also been used as a pejorative term, implying exaggerated theatricality and an over-concentration on the unusual or bizarre.⁷⁸ This is an aesthetic judgement aimed at the object itself, rather than its incongruity with its surroundings. When the term is applied to the altar, in conjunction with other more blatantly negative terms, it is hard to deny that the adjective “baroque” is intended to have negative connotations.

Why was the Cassioli altar so often termed “baroque”? Once the label had taken hold it was repeated.⁷⁹ Presumably, when first applied to the altar it was sincerely held to be an accurate description by those concerned. If so, it may have fallen into that category which Jordanova describes as “peculiarly vulnerable to criticism or neglect by those who espouse simplicity as an aesthetic norm”.⁸⁰ Those involved in planning the re-ordered sanctuary often referred to the desired, yet difficult to define, goal of “noble simplicity”, the term found in the documents of Vatican II where it referred to the rites of the Church.⁸¹

The Warren Altar

According to the Cathedral Administrator, the new high altar was to be “a simple but dignified altar of white reconstituted stone”.⁸² The stone selected was cream-coloured bush-hammered terrazzo.⁸³ After its installation the Administrator reported that its weight

⁷⁸ See Germain Bazin, *The Baroque. Principles, Styles, Modes, Themes*, New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1968, p.16, for this use in 16th century France, and Ludmilla Jordanova, *The Look of the Past. Visual and Material Evidence in Historical Practice*, Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012, for this use in the 18th century.

⁷⁹ Hanrahan, op. cit. p.78, for example: “Bishop Grimes never saw his baroque high altar in place against Petre’s elegant classical columns...the clash of styles symbolized in stone the clash of personalities that marked the construction of the building.”

⁸⁰ Jordanova, op. cit. p.90.

⁸¹ See for example, the Architectural Brief, section 26, p.5, which insists that the altar and reading desk for the future Blessed Sacrament Chapel should be “utterly simple”. See also “Sacrosanctum Concilium, the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy”, Section 34, in *Vatican Council II. The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents*, ed. Austin Flannery, Northport, New York: Costello Publishing Company, 1975, p.12.

⁸² Mons. James Harrington, announcement of Phase Two of the Cathedral Conservation Project, Sunday 30 September, 1974. CCDA. The stone for the new altar was not “reconstituted” from the marble of the Cassioli altar, although this is at times asserted. See for example the booklet published to commemorate the centenary of the diocese in 1987 and the cathedral’s lavishly illustrated souvenir publication *The Cathedral of the Blessed Sacrament, Christchurch, New Zealand* of 1993 with its claim on p.17 that “the remaining marble [was] reconstituted to form the modern pulpit.”

⁸³ *Warren & Mahoney Architects. 1958-1989*, Christchurch: Warren & Mahoney, 1989, p.80.

was two and a half tons.⁸⁴ In form it is simple, with the strong horizontals of the large, deep altar table almost floating on, but at the same time securely attached to, its base (figs. 37, 38). The base is not a solid mass but has open areas beneath the mensa based on the curve of the seating of the stools and Presidential Chair behind; by this means the ensemble of sanctuary furniture is effectively united. The simple forms of the large altar strongly assert its presence, despite its light colour in the setting of the sanctuary's wealth of Oamaru stone, while the (uncarpeted) mosaic floor further serves to anchor it in the sanctuary (cf. figs. 24 and 37).

Miles Warren's interest in simple geometric forms, so evident in his modernist architectural works, is clearly evident in his altar. He states:

I chose the stripped-down neo-classical style of the 18th-century French architect Étienne Boullée, using the classical geometric forms but without the neo-classical ornament.⁸⁵

Warren himself describes the form of the altar as a "massive U" and that of the pulpit/lectern as "a cylinder on a base of concave curves".⁸⁶

⁸⁴ Mons. Harrington, *Cathedral Bulletin*, 21 April 1975. The new lectern weighed two tons and the base of the President's Chair one and a half tons. All were composed of the same reconstituted stone. The work was carried out by Thomas Andrews & Sons of Christchurch, the company which is reported to have purchased the marble of the Cassioli altar.

⁸⁵ Miles Warren, *Miles Warren. An Autobiography*, Christchurch: Canterbury University Press, 2008, p.122.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

Conclusion

In the holdings of the Christchurch Catholic Diocesan Archives a wealth of previously unstudied material contains much information about the altars which have been used in the sanctuary of the Cathedral of the Blessed Sacrament. Although there is less information concerning the pro-cathedral it is still possible to examine the Kimbell/Button altar in detail. The iconography of the altar has been explored in this study, and the place of the altar in the physical and liturgical setting of the church explored.

Petre's design for the Cathedral of the Blessed Sacrament included an altar design, with a detailed drawing, which has not previously been examined in any detail. Although it was not executed it deserves to be acknowledged. It is particularly important to have a clear understanding of the artist's intentions in this regard, as his wishes were subsequently misrepresented.

The marble altar by Giuseppe Cassioli (fig. 2) was the work of a significant Italian sculptor with an impressive record of notable commissions. It shows his skills in working marble and bronze, and the records of the commission prove his meticulous working methods. Comparisons with possible sources and his other works show his care to select and combine a range of sources to produce a fitting result, always carefully tailored to its context.

The 1970 conservation appeal aimed to remove the Cassioli altar which was deemed inappropriate for its architectural setting and also an impediment to changed liturgical requirements. Figure 39 shows the layout adopted during the period of conservation and re-ordering. The thesis argues that Cassioli's altar was not appreciated at this time. This is reflected in media accounts from the period. The care taken by Cassioli to create an utterly appropriate work for its setting was completely unacknowledged. Furthermore, the pieces of the altar that were retained within the building were resited in such a way that their iconographical meaning was almost completely lost: the Eucharistic focus had gone.

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Figures



Figure 1 Interior of the pro-cathedral, late 1880s. CCDA.



Figure 2 Sanctuary of the pro-cathedral post 1884. CCDA



Figure 3 Finished drawing by Francis Petre, Architect, of the proposed cathedral. CCDA.



Figure 4 View of the Cathedral of the Blessed Sacrament from the south-west. CCDA.



Figure 5 View of the Cathedral of the Blessed Sacrament from the south-east. CCDA



Figure 6 Interior of the cathedral prior to opening in 1905. CCDA.



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Figure 7 View of nave and sanctuary from the apse gallery at the opening of the cathedral, 12 February, 1905. CCDA.



Figure 9 Francis Petre, finished drawing of design (unexecuted) for high altar and canopy for the cathedral. 1904. CCDA.

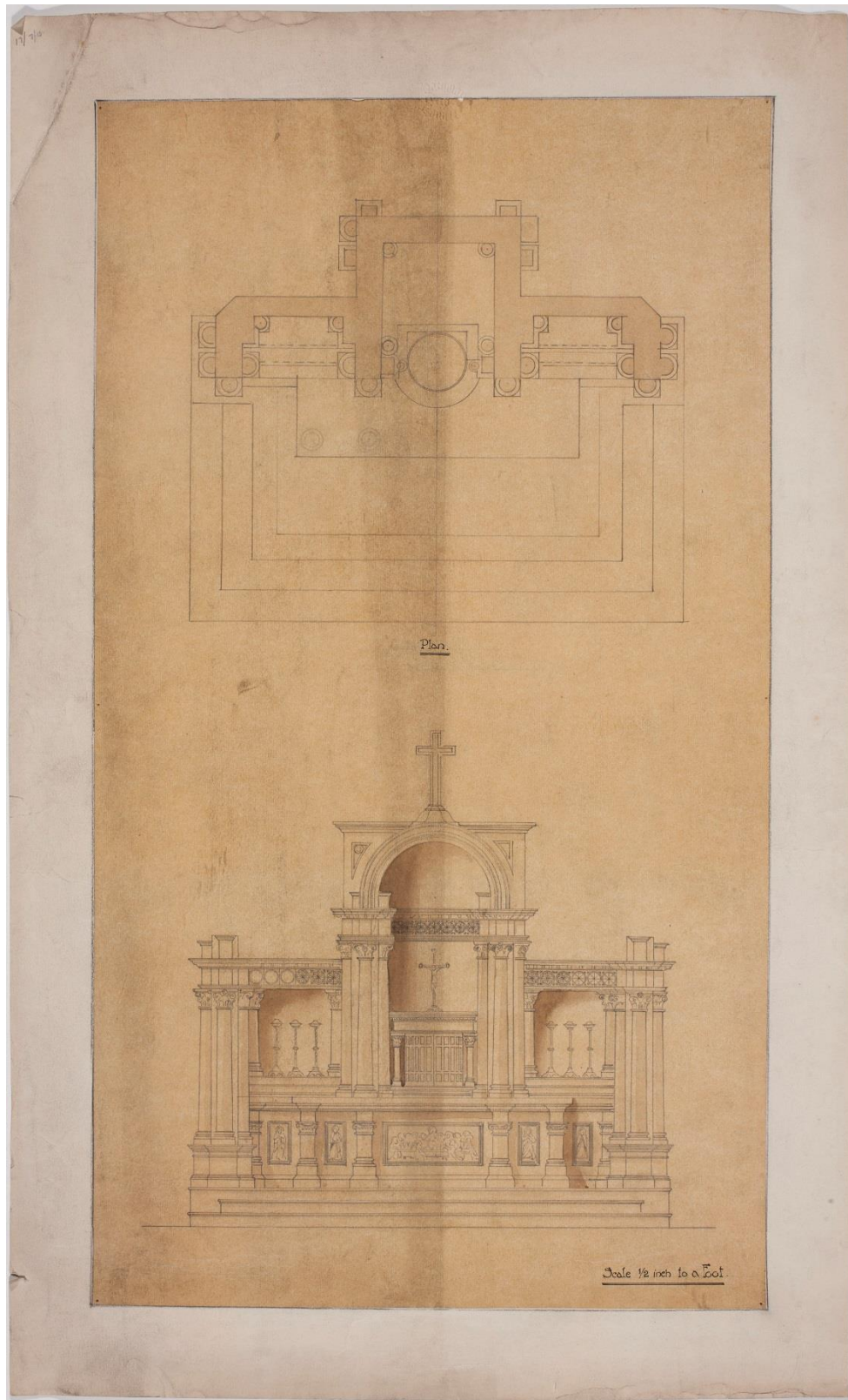


Figure 10 Luttrells' plan and elevation of proposed high altar for cathedral. CCDA.

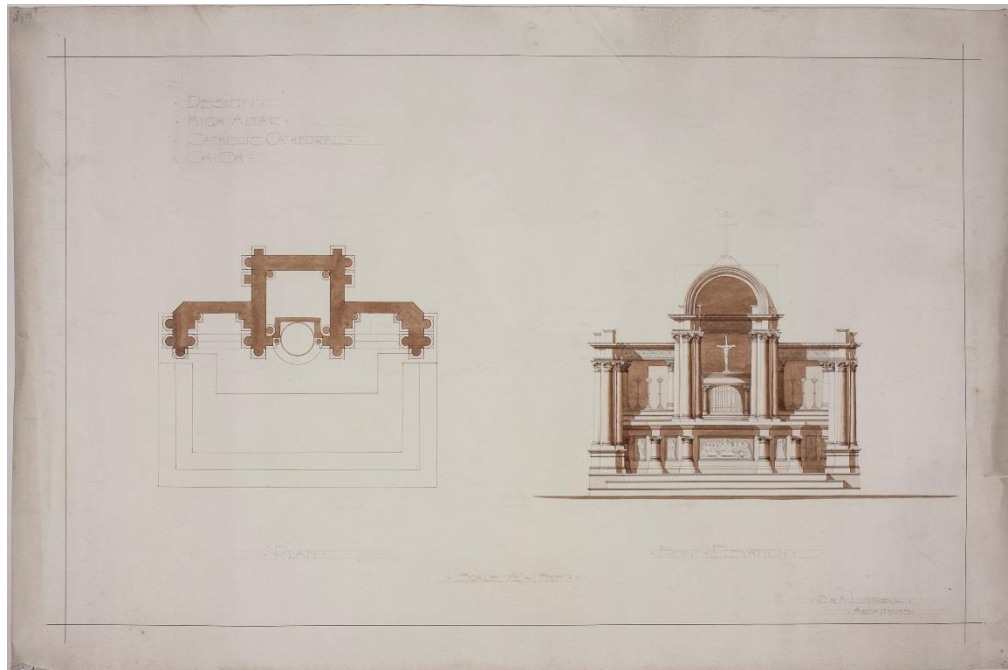


Figure 11 Luttrells' plan and elevation of proposed high altar for the cathedral. CCDA.

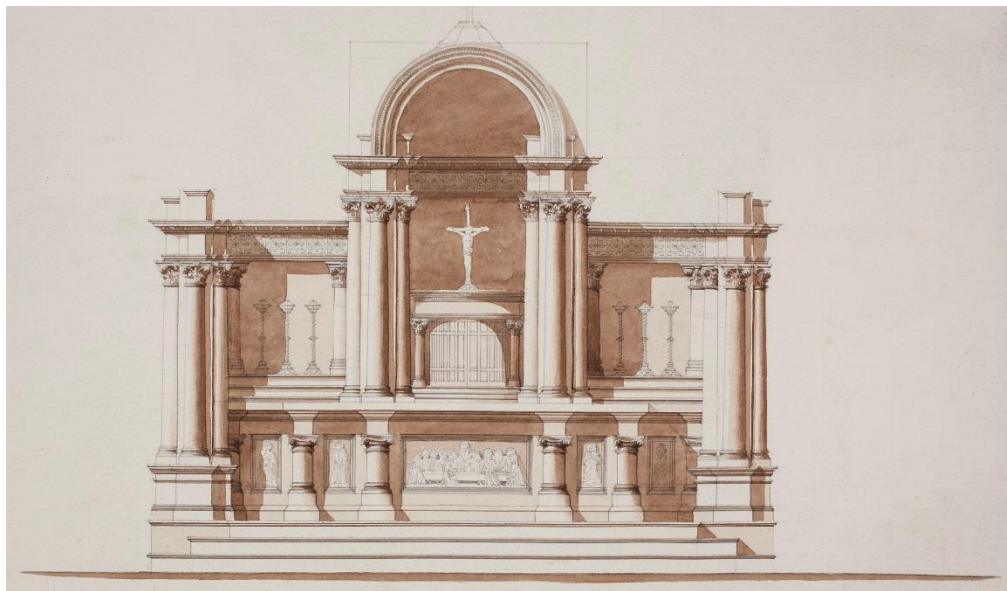


Figure 12 Enlarged view of the proposed high altar by the Luttrells. CCDA.



Figure 13 Giuseppe Cassioli, tomb of Rossini, 1902 (left) and Bernardo Rossellino's tomb of Leonardo Bruno, 1444-1450 (right), Santa Croce, Florence. Creative Commons.www.flickr.com/photos/prof_richaerd/8023285633.



Figure 14 Giuseppe Cassioli, tomb of Rossini, Santa Croce, Florence, 1902. Creative Commons.
https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/0/09/Tomb_Rossini_Florence.jpg

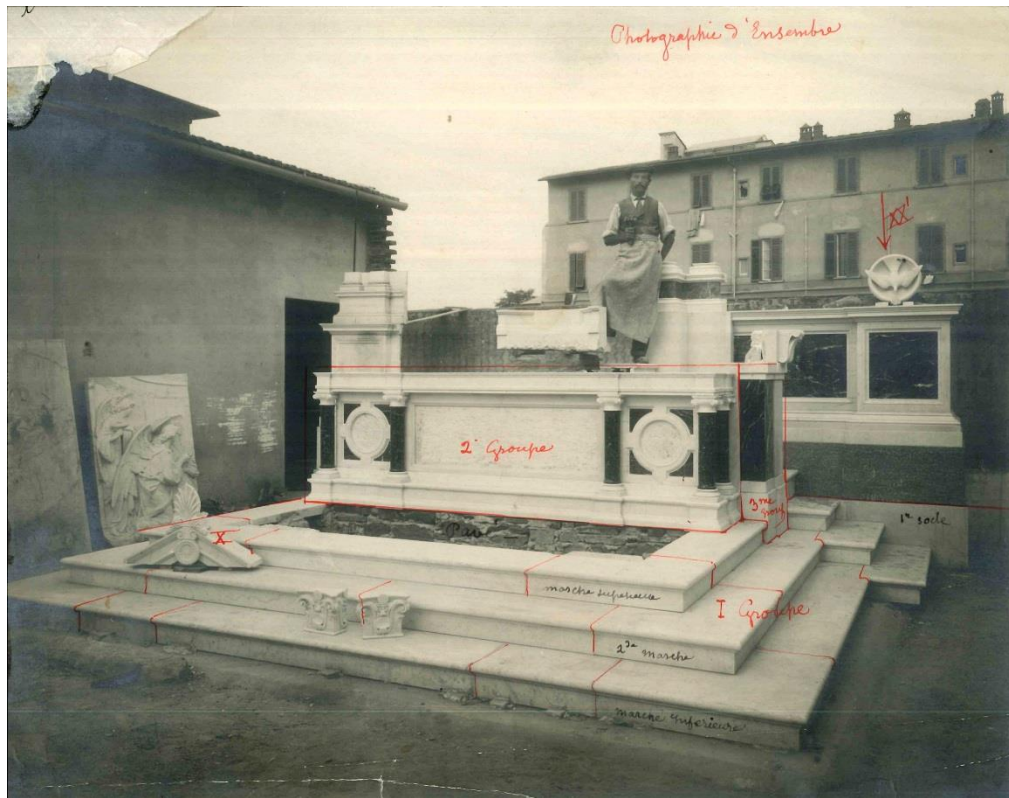


Figure 15 Giuseppe Cassioli with the partially assembled high altar, Florence, 1915. CCDA.



Figure 16 Photograph supplied by Giuseppe Cassioli to assist in altar assembly. 1915. CCDA.

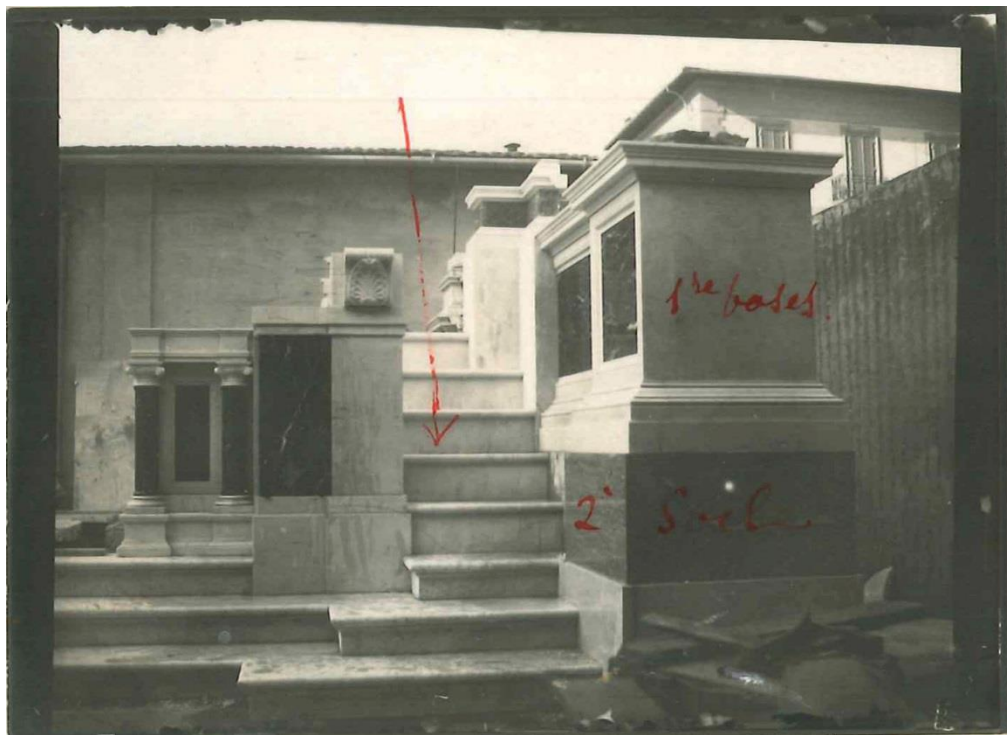


Figure 17 Photo supplied by Giuseppe Cassioli to assist in altar assembly, 1915. CCDA.

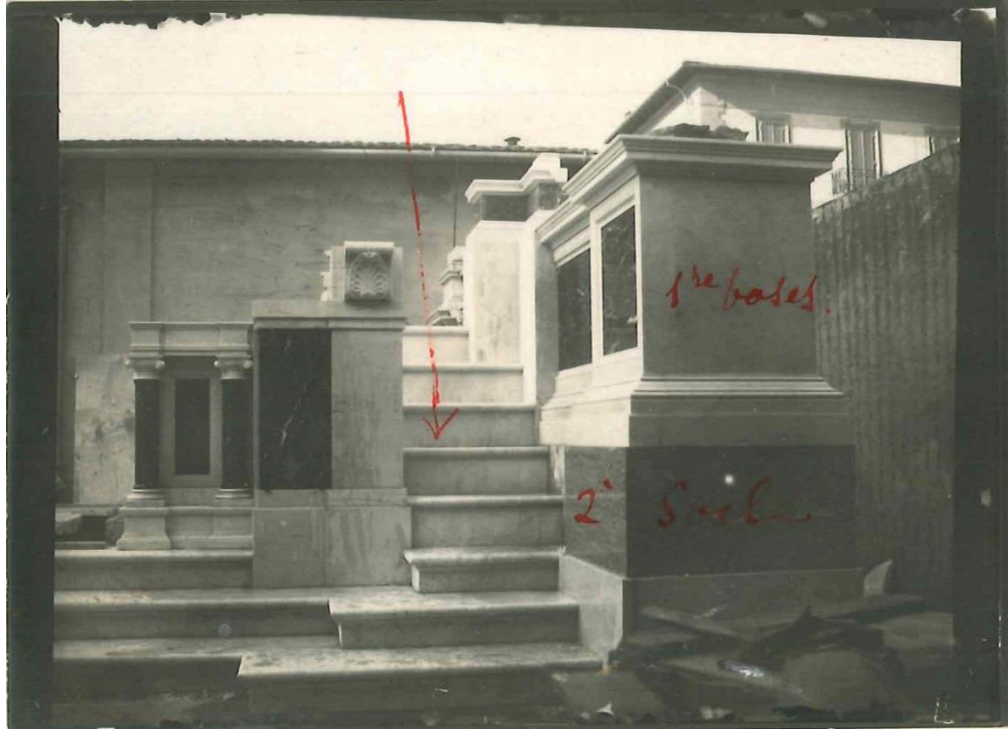


Figure 18 Photo supplied by Giuseppe Cassioli to assist in altar assembly, 1915. CCDA.



Figure 19 Photograph supplied by Giuseppe Cassioli: marble relief panel for cathedral altar reredos, 1915.
CCDA



Figure 20 Photograph supplied by Giuseppe Cassioli of gilt-bronze support for the cathedral altar's Eucharistic Throne, 1915. CCDA.

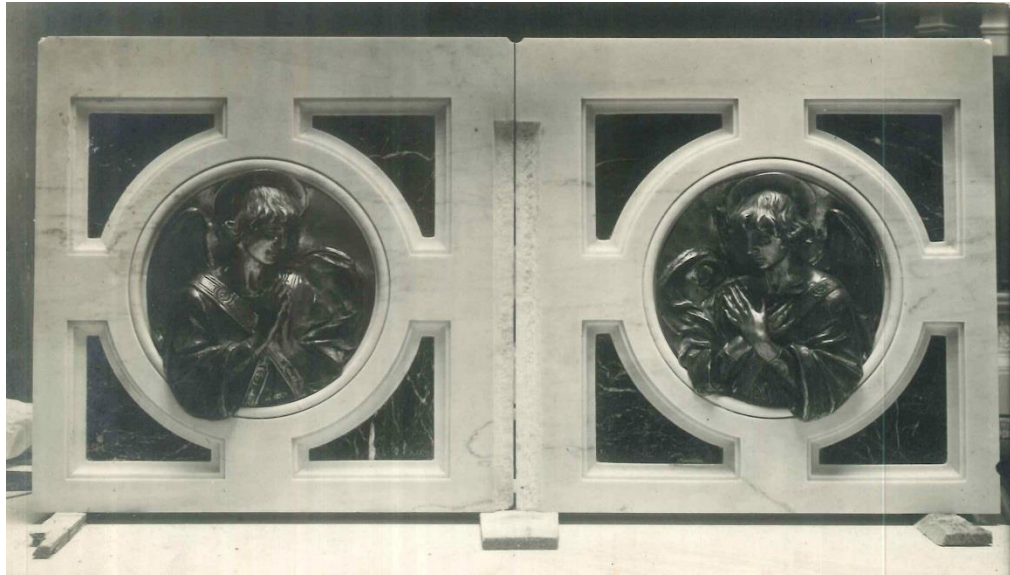


Figure 21 Photograph supplied by Giuseppe Cassioli: gilt-bronze roundels for cathedral altar frontal, 1915. CCDA,



Figure 22 Photograph supplied by Giuseppe Cassioli: gilt-bronze relief panel for cathedral altar frontal, 1915. CCDA.



Figure 23 Giuseppe Cassioli: high altar in Cathedral of the Blessed Sacrament, Christchurch, 1916. CCDA.



Figure 24 Mosaic sanctuary floor: Cathedral of the Blessed Sacrament, 1916. CCDA.



Figure 25 Cassioli altar: Cathedral of the Blessed Sacrament, 1950s. CCDA



Figure 26 Cathedral nave and sanctuary, 1950s. CCDA.



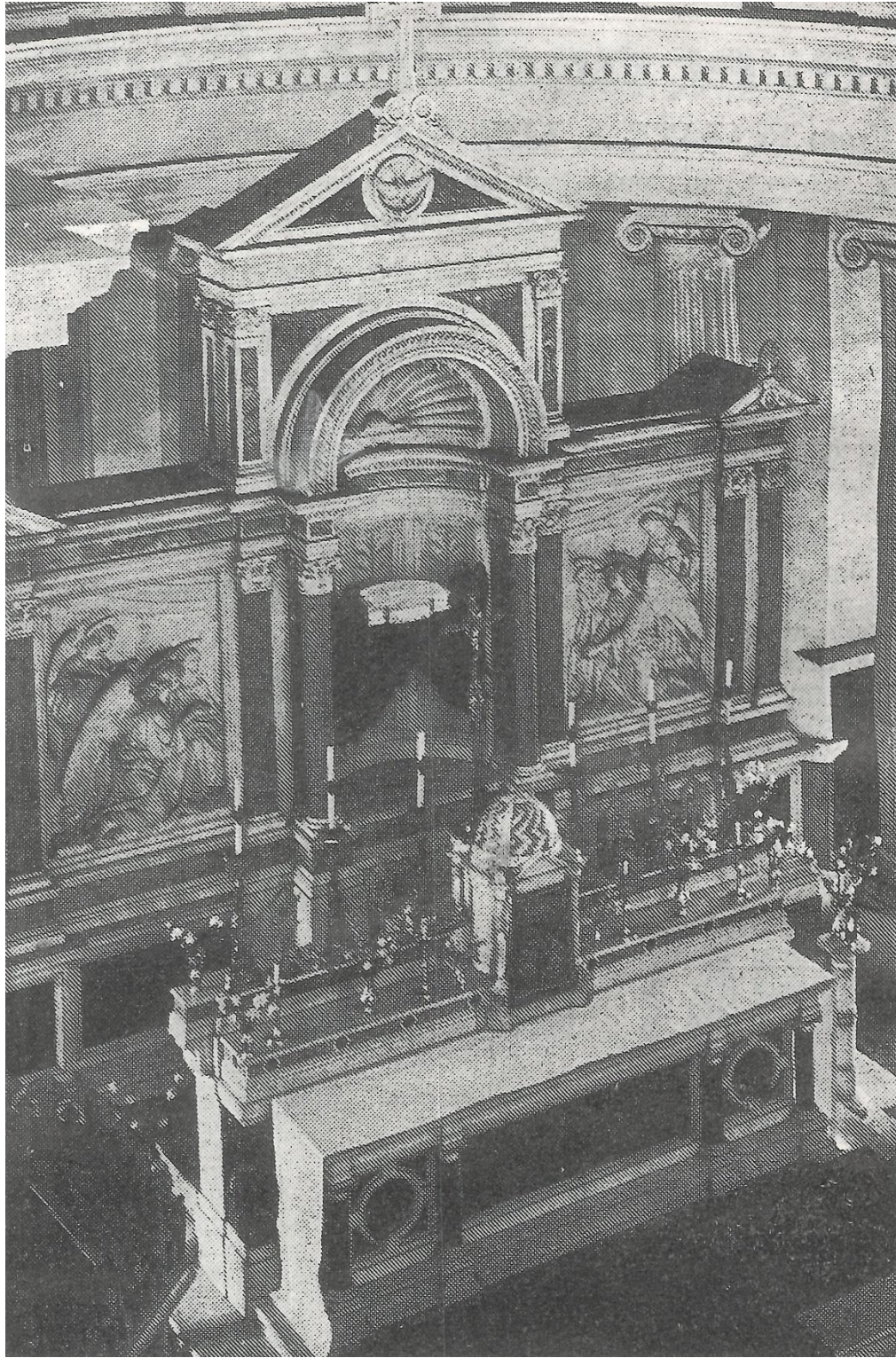


Figure 28 Cassioli altar from the cathedral gallery, 1970. CCDA.



Figure 29 Cathedral sanctuary from the gallery, showing temporary wooden altar in front of Cassioli altar: wedding, early 1970s. CCDA.

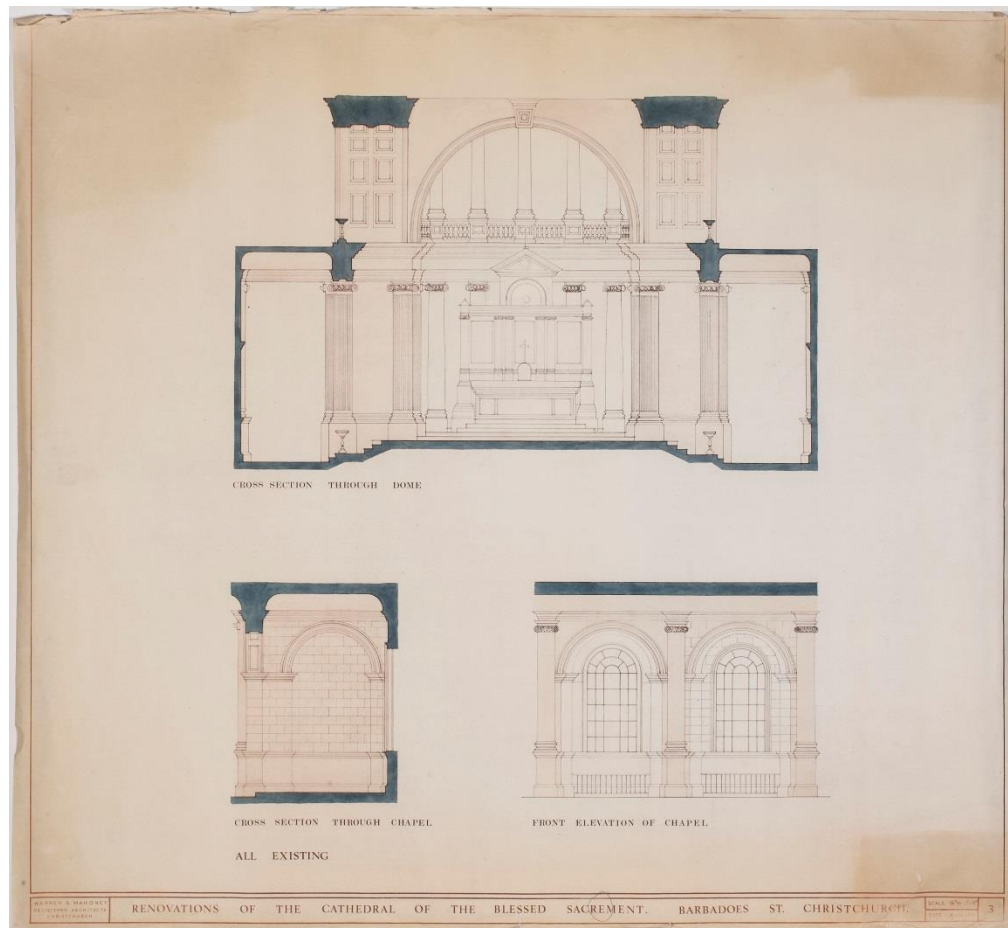


Figure 30 Warren and Mahoney: renovation plans showing placement of Cassioli altar, 1970. CCDA.

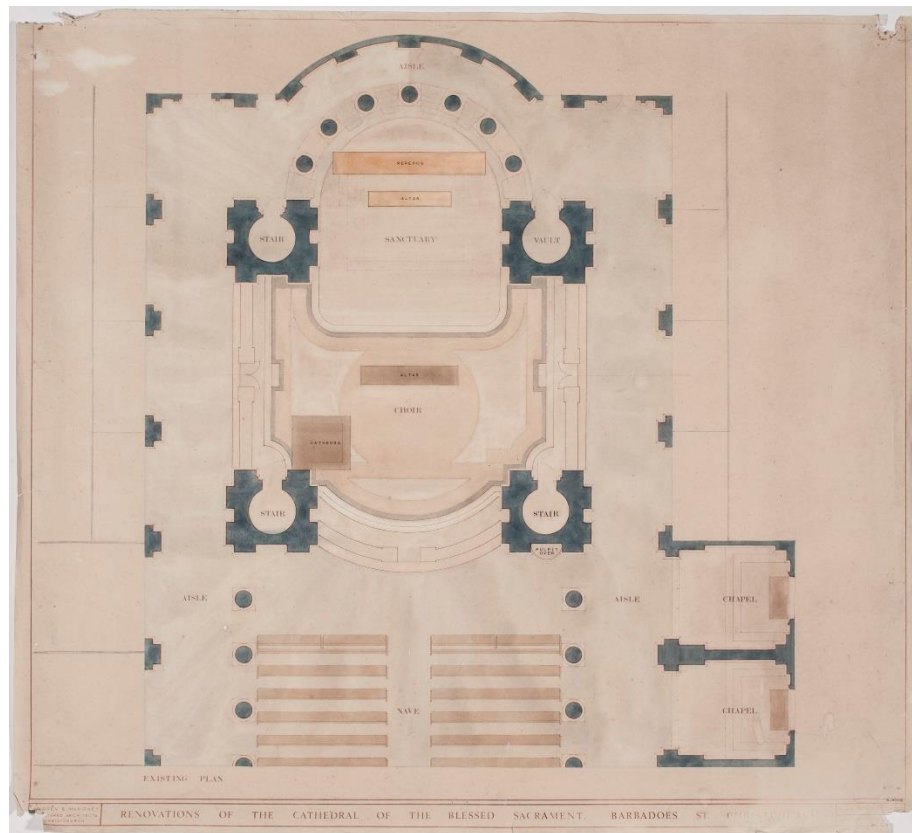


Figure 31 Warren and Mahoney: plan showing existing placement of sanctuary fixtures and side chapels: 1970. CCDA.

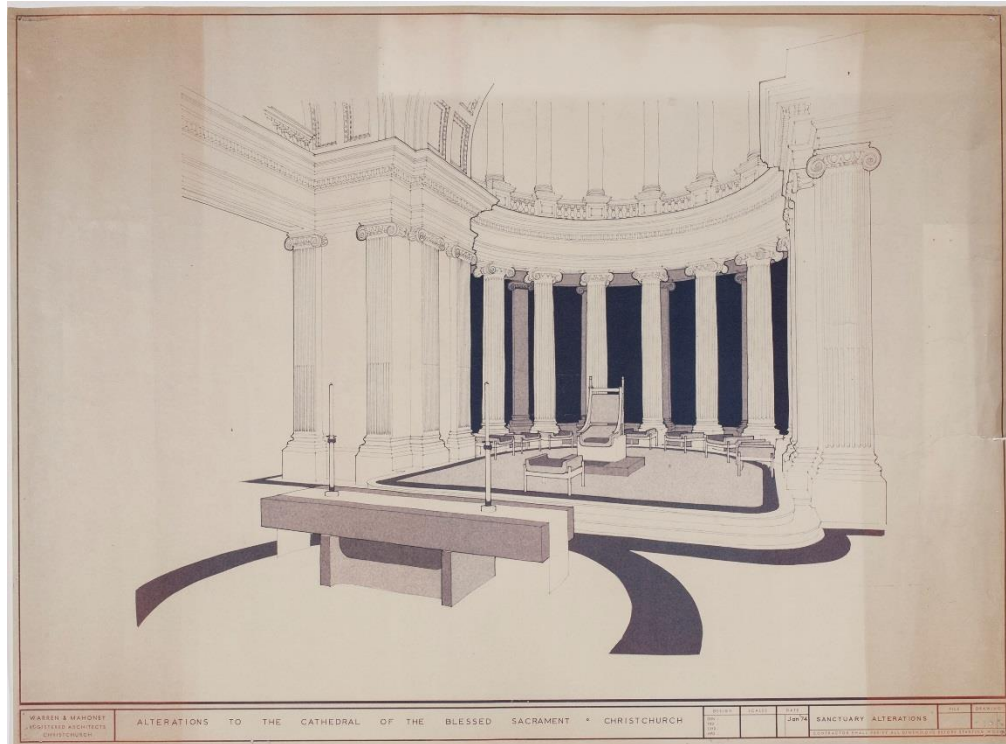


Figure 33 Warren and Mahoney: drawing of proposed alterations to sanctuary, with seating and altar by Miles Warren, 1974. CCDA.

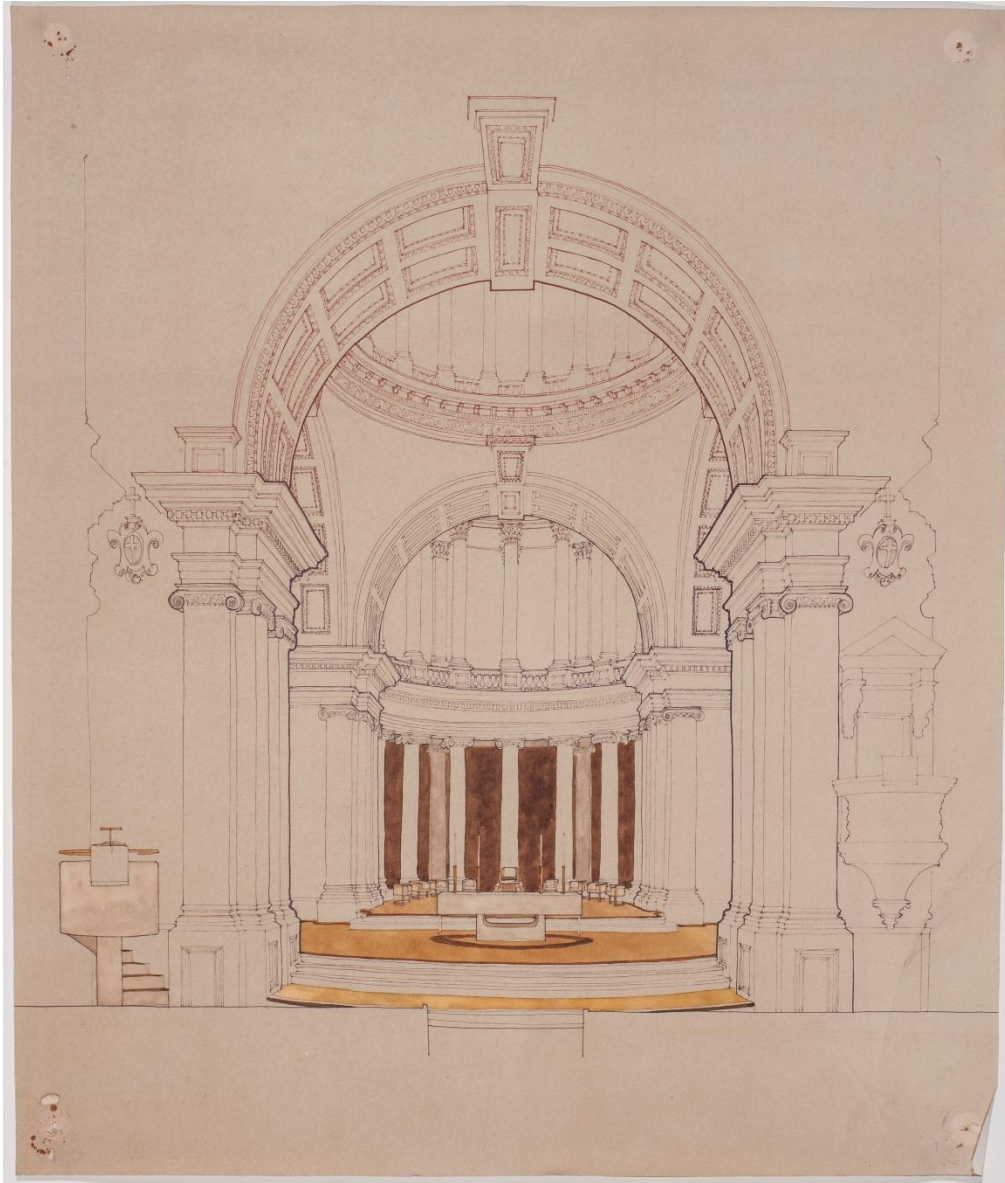


Figure 34 Finished drawing of proposed sanctuary alterations: pulpit, altar and seating in sanctuary by Miles Warren, n.d.



Figure 35 Cathedral sanctuary after removal of Cassioli altar, 1974. CCDA.



Figure 36 Cathedral Sanctuary with new altar and seating by Miles Warren, post 1974. CCDA.



Figure 37 Placement of Warren altar on mosaic floor of cathedral sanctuary, 1990s. CCDA.



Figure 38 View of cathedral sanctuary showing Warren altar and seating, c.1990s.

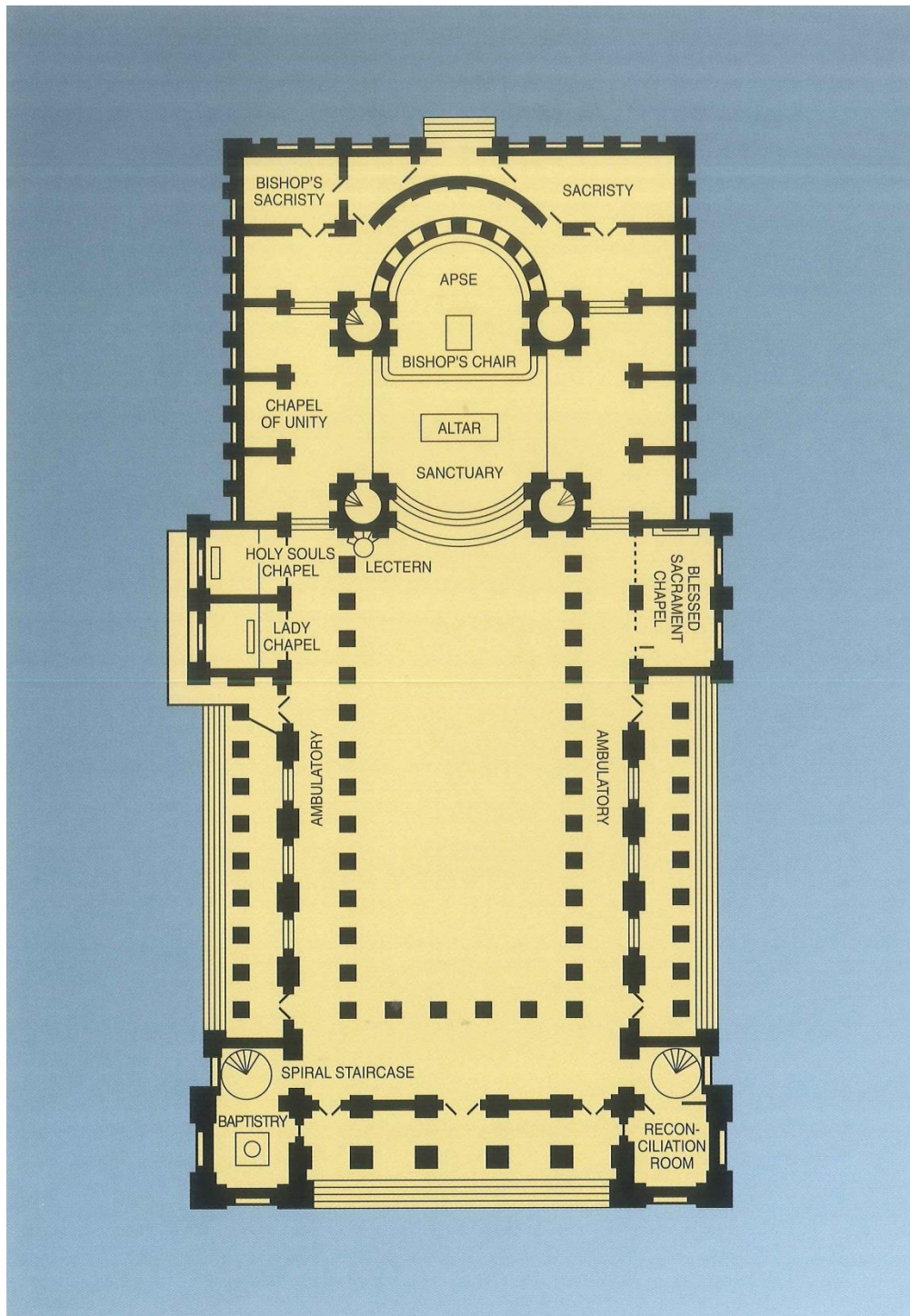


Figure 39 Plan of cathedral showing after 1970-1974 reordering. CCDA.

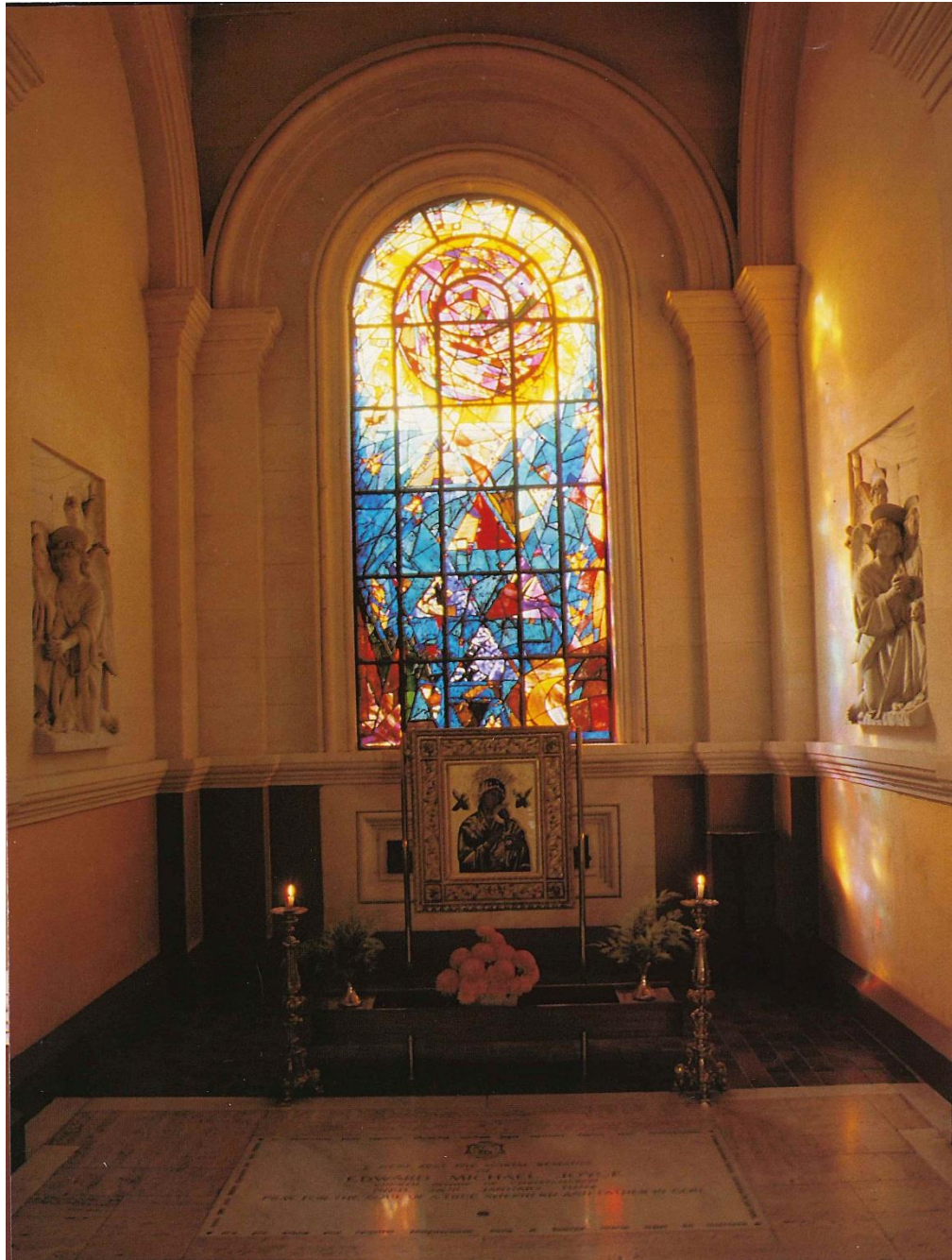


Figure 40 Lady Chapel of cathedral with immured marble relief panels from Cassioli alt reredos: 1990s. CCDA.



Figure 41 Giuseppe Cassioli: marble relief panel from cathedral altar reredos after removal to Lady Chapel in 1974. CCDA.



Figure 42 Giuseppe Cassioli: marble relief panel from cathedral altar reredos after removal to Lady Chapel in 1974. CCDA.

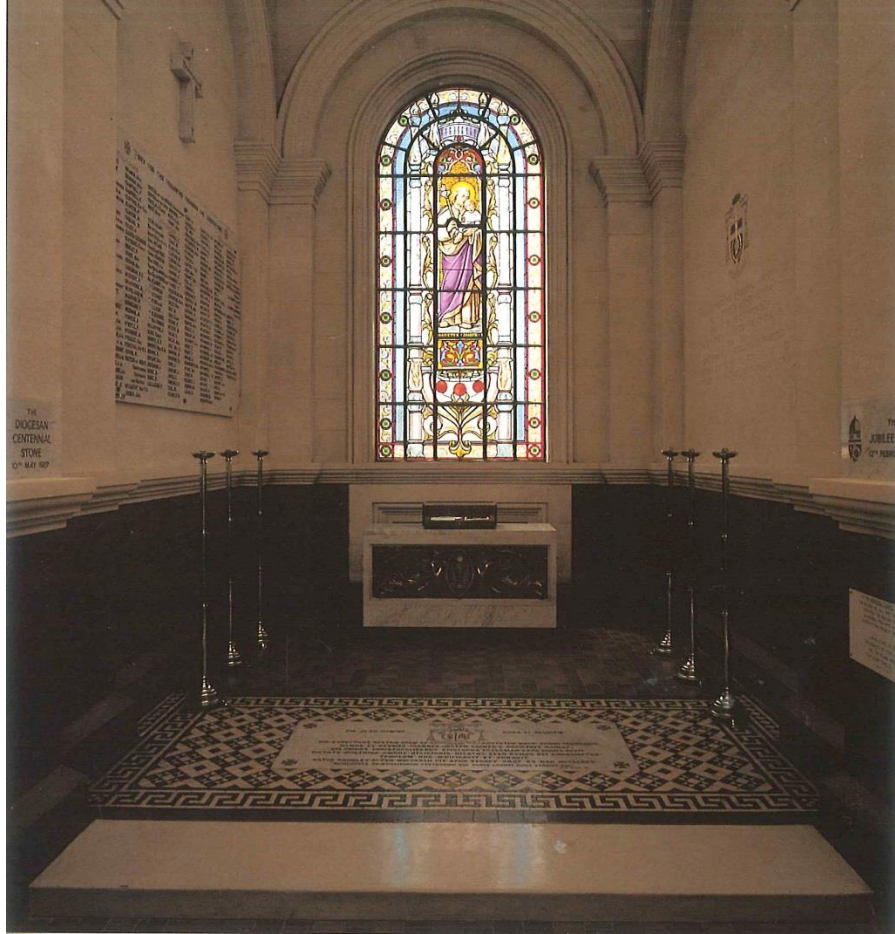


Figure 43 Gilt-bronze cathedral altar frontal relief panel from the Cassioli altar after relocation in the Memorial Chapel in 1974. CCDA.



Figure 44 Gilt-bronze cathedral altar frontal relief panel from the Cassioli altar, photographed in Memorial Chapel. CCDA.



Figure 45 Interior: Cathedral of the Blessed Sacrament after 2011 earthquake and later removal of dome. CCDA.

Appendix

The future of the cathedral

The cathedral was severely damaged in the major earthquake of 22 February 2011 (fig. 45). The dome has since been removed and the building made safe. The diocese is prepared to spend \$45 million on the restoration of the nave of the building, if this proves feasible. \$15 million is the fundraising goal. At the time of submission work has started to enable access and the required testing.